

Master's thesis in Ibsen Studies

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Existential Boredom in Ibsen's and Chekhov's Plays

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1. Introduction

Today, in the age of endless possibilities and all kinds of entertainment, boredom nonetheless strikes people like never before. This phenomenon is paradoxical and thus extremely interesting to explore. Not only psychological and sociological, but also literary studies can contribute to a better understanding of this state of mind that kills human will and lust for life.

It is no surprise that boredom, being an integral part of our modern life, is a recurrent motif of the XX century literature. However, before it becomes widespread in the literature of existentialism and modernism, it appeared in some literary works at the turn of the century – for instance, in late plays of the two classics – Henrik Ibsen and Anton Pavlovich Chekhov – which both can be regarded as “the fathers of modern drama”. When their characters face a personal existential crisis, it often manifests itself through profound boredom. Their attempts to fight it and find themselves create genuine dramatic tension.

In my thesis I intend to discuss the concept of existential boredom and explore it in Ibsen’s and Chekhov’s plays. I will try to examine what stands for their characters’ boredom – namely to find out how boredom is presented by the playwrights as existential, study the roots of this “malady” and ways out of it, even though that kind of analysis can never be exhaustive. I will try to answer the following questions: How did Henrik Ibsen and Anton Pavlovich Chekhov introduce the “undramatic” motif of existential boredom into their plays and what is common and different in their ways of doing it? I will also try to understand in what way boredom is related to the lack of meaning and whether Ibsen’s and Chekhov’s characters manage to fill inner vacuum with existential values (such as love and work). Besides, I intend to find out how boredom is linked to romanticism and longing for another time and place. To answer all these questions I first need to explain whether I regard existential boredom as a social or individual phenomenon.

Examining this subject seems interesting and essential to me because Ibsen’s and Chekhov’s works are not deeply explored from existential point of view. Particularly the motif of boredom was given surprisingly little attention even though this motif is obviously recurrent in their dramas.

For my research I have chosen a limited number of Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays where the motif of boredom is most distinct and frequent in my eyes: *Hedda Gabler* (1890), *The Lady from the Sea* (1888); *Three Sisters* (1900), *Uncle Vanya* (1899). I will analyze those texts in comparison, trace the boredom motif and bring into focus different existential issues of boredom paying special attention to the scenes where characters explicitly complain they are bored.

Before I start any comparative analysis, I need to explain what I mean by "comparative analysis" and give a short overview as to what approaches we can find in Ibsen-Chekhov contrastive literary studies.

A number of critics¹ draw comparisons between Ibsen's and Chekhov's dramatic works. The contradictory literary relations of those two authors have become a commonplace. For instance, the English writer John B. Priestley argues: "As a dramatist Chekhov is Ibsen turned on his head" (Priestley 2005: 159). Martin Esslin, a theatre critic and scholar, points to the structural difference between Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays:

...Structurally, he [Ibsen] tended to adhere to the convention of the well-made play. Ibsen's analytical plots developed toward a climax with the relentless logic and compressed time-scale of French classical drama... It was Chekhov who took the decisive step beyond Ibsen. He not only renounced the convention of characters who constantly explain themselves to the audience, but he also discarded the last remnants of the plot structure of the well-made play (Esslin 1999: 141).

These conclusions certainly concern not only the structure of plays, but the content as well – what themes are qualified by the authors as suited to constitute a dramatic situation. Esslin further presents Chekhov's theoretical program by quoting his letter written in 1881 – long before he wrote his best-known plays:

In real life people do not spend every minute in shooting each other, hanging themselves or declaring their love for each other. They don't devote all their time to trying to say witty things. Rather they are engaged in eating, drinking, flirting and talking about trivialities – and that is what should be happening on stage... On stage everything should be just as complicated and just as simple as in life. People eat their meals, and in the meantime their fortune is made or their life ruined (Chekhov 1994).

All that is regarded by Esslin as the opposite principles to Ibsen's ones. Instead of exceptional heroes and exceptional events Chekhov presents "trivialities" – as a part of life and therefore a part of his dramas.

The Swedish critic Martin Lamm analyzes a number of similar motifs in Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays and regards Chekhov as a talented Ibsen's successor. This point of view on the playwrights – Chekhov being "a learner" and Ibsen being "a teacher" – is more or less common in literary studies of Scandinavian scholars.

Another Swedish scholar – Nils A. Nilsson – does not join this established point of view. Unlike Martin Lamm, he supposes that comparison of Ibsen and Chekhov in a traditional way is an invalid issue for literary studies, since it is hardly possible to prove any direct Ibsen's influence on Chekhov (in topics, ideas or poetics). Moreover, he argues, it gives nothing to literature studies. However, Nilsson believes this question could be of great interest if one approaches the subject from the modern drama perspective. From that point of view – in the context of drama development – he considers Chekhov's plays as a step forward compared to Ibsen's works (Nilsson 1958).

Accordingly, the Norwegian Slavist Martin Nag avoids regarding Chekhov as a direct successor of Ibsen, but nevertheless claims: "Regarded as a literary phenomenon, Chekhov comes AFTER Ibsen. And it is tempting to oppose them to each other and ask: in what way did Chekhov get impulses from Ibsen?"² (Nag 1967: 109). This question seems extremely crucial to Martin Nag; his main intention in his research is to find out if the connection between Chekhov and Ibsen direct:

The question is complicated. A connection IS there. But is it direct or indirect? Chekhov continues Ibsen – and at the same time breaks with him and creates something new. But he does not necessarily have to be "influenced" for this reason³ (ibid: 109).

Even though the scholar does not clearly state that Chekhov was under the direct influence of Ibsen, I suppose, Martin Nag in his researches is too concerned with direct parallels in Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays (for instance, he regards Chekhov's three sisters as some kind of a collective version of Hedda Gabler): "They are all Hedda's relatives. They are literally her blood sisters – regarded in terms of creative artistic influence"⁴ (ibid: 115). Creative influence is still influence: Nag is trying to show a direct continuity between Ibsen and Chekhov – *borrowed* motifs, symbols, ideas and literary methods.

Nevertheless it is very important to note that regarding Chekhov's plays as the next stage of world drama development, he defines him as "anti-Ibsen" (Nag 1970). Like M. Esslin, M. Nag finds significant differences between Chekhov's and Ibsen's plays both in form and content. He considers Chekhov as a creator of new "anti-dramatic" theatre – with no action, no obvious conflicts, with a subtext and undertones that always matter and with unexpressive "characterless" characters living their ordinary everyday lives. Nag makes some interesting points discussing Ibsen's and Chekhov's different ways of creating characters: "Both Ibsen and Chekhov are able to create lifelike characters; but where Ibsen goes deeply into psychology, Chekhov just gives hints and nuances"⁵ (Nag 1967: 127). Nag calls Ibsen for "soul's realist" and Chekhov – for "soul's impressionist"⁶ (ibid: 127).

In his later works Martin Nag returns to the issue of literary connections and precedence and comes to conclusion that, with his innovations, Chekhov gets ahead of his "teacher": "...Ibsen's 'learner' Chekhov becomes a master and a new 'teacher'"⁷ (Nag 1997: 126). He emphasizes that Ibsen's "creative" influence on Chekhov should not be understood as something negative – that kind of competitive approach was accepted in both Soviet and Western literary criticism and is not justified anymore. The first positive changes in that established approach he finds in Tatyana Shakh-Azizova's researches. Unlike other Soviet critics, she tries to avoid underestimating Chekhov's interest in Ibsen.

However, T. Shakh-Azizova in her research *Chekhov and Western-European Drama of His Time* (1966) is not very concerned with the priority of this or that playwright: she rather tries to find common trends in drama development and relate it to the particular historical epoch. She sees the basic feature of this time in the middle class crisis: "Crisis penetrates into all the cells of society: politics and inner life, culture, everyday life and ethics"⁸ (Shakh-Azizova 1966: 9). The scholar points out that in this period drama faces a totally new task – namely, "to show not open and vibrant dramatism of outstanding events, but concealed tragic nature of the very course of life"⁹ (ibid: 33).

According to Shakh-Azizova, Ibsen and Chekhov perform this task in different ways: "The principle of the tragic inherent in everyday life is kept by Chekhov with absolute consistency"¹⁰ while "Ibsen picturing everyday life constantly blows it up – by eccentricity of his heroes, their uncommon characters, fates and ambitions. The root of their tragedy is exactly their failure to assimilate with life routine – just like Ibsen himself, they long for something exceptional"¹¹ (ibid: 33).

Accordingly, the Bulgarian critic Antonija Gospodinova tries to draw some parallels in Ibsen's and Chekhov's characters' psychology. Moreover, she stresses the difference in the playwrights' attitude toward their heroes:

Chekhov's heroes are depicted not as sharply and schematically. ...Chekhov shows us their weaknesses with gentle irony. ...Chekhov...does not judge and "punish". Ibsen is generally harsher to his characters¹² (Gospodinova 1999: 141).

Performing her comparative researches (Gospodinova 1999, 2001) she manages to avoid the discussion of "direct or indirect" connections.

In line with Shakh-Azizova's and Gospodinova's ideas, I am not interested in the issue of literary borrowing. I will not discuss in my work the precedence of this or that author in developing a specific motif. I will only look at *how* it is developed. In other words, by comparative research I mean drawing certain similarities and differences in presentation of the same motif in the selected plays of two authors. It is completely irrelevant for me whether those authors were contemporaries or not, whether they were interested in each other's works and whether they influenced or inspired each other.

I believe this sort of literary analysis is quite rare in general. As for Ibsen and Chekhov in particular, there are not so many researches that study specific motifs and themes of their plays in comparison. One of the few examples might be Knut Brynhildsvoll who avoids discussing literary influence and deals with the motif of melancholy/anticipation in Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* – different ways of developing this motif (Brynhildsvoll 2002). Errol Durbach traces various romantic motifs in Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays (Durbach 1982, 2007). To my knowledge, *existential boredom* as a distinct motif was not explored in their plays at all.

In order to give my interpretation of existential boredom I will use certain fundamental works devoted to boredom: *A Philosophy of Boredom* by Lars Svendsen (Svendsen 2005), *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* by Patricia Meyer Spacks (Spacks 1995) and *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* by Elisabeth S. Goodstein (Goodstein 2005). In these significant researches boredom is examined from different points of view with various literary, philosophical, historical and social references. I will try to apply some ideas of those scholars to my analysis of

Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays. I find Svendsen's research particularly comprehensive and relevant to my thesis.

Since I will discuss boredom from the existential point of view, certain existentialists' concepts will be therefore also considered – ideas expressed by Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, Viktor Frankl and others. There are a number of critics who regarded the two playwrights as contributors to and sometimes predecessors of the literary and philosophical movement of existentialism. In case of Ibsen I could name Errol Durbach (Durbach 1982), Mary Graham Lund (Lund 1960), Ellen Mortensen (Mortensen 1996), Eugene Webb (Webb 1970), etc. In relation to Chekhov the following scholars are relevant: Alexandr Genis and Petr Vayl (Genis, Vayl 1995), Vladimir Kataev (Kataev 1989, 1995, 2002), R. E. Lapushin (Lapushin 2002), V. Y. Linkov (Linkov 1995), Gordon McVay (McVay 1995), A. D. Stepanov (Stepanov 2005), etc.

The existential perspective on Chekhov's works is rather new and therefore very interesting. No wonder that the most established view on Chekhov in Soviet criticism was social-political perspective. For instance, G. P. Berdnikov commented on *Three Sisters*: "The basic idea of the new play is that current social conditions are hostile to an individual"¹³ (Berdnikov 1957: 163). In contrast to that, I will attempt to avoid regarding Chekhov as a sociologist and will further give some reasons why. Here I would only like to note that I share V. Y. Linkov's opinion that Chekhov was one of the first writers who managed to go beyond "social-historical determinism"¹⁴ which was typical for the XIX century realism (Linkov 1995: 5). According to Linkov, literature of that time presented stories of a nobleman, a merchant, a clerk...etc. These general categories formed the essence of an individual and defined everything – their behaviour, psychology, attitude to the society, fate. In contrast, the essence of the Chekhov's individual is that he is estranged from "the general" (ibid: 5). That is his main trait, his nature and his misfortune. Accordingly, I. P. Viduetskaya was one of the first critics who paid attention to that: "Chekhov is not interested in an individual as a social type"¹⁵ (Viduetskaya 1966: 40).

Even though Western criticism was free of the deeply rooted ideological prejudices Ibsen had also been long read as an author engaged in ethical and social issues. Eugene Webb states that only in the twentieth century a different view of Ibsen was developed: "The desire to read Ibsen as a fairly straightforward social reformer has slowly given way to the idea that Ibsen tended, especially in his later years, toward a basic pessimism with regard to man and man's place in the universe" (Webb 1970:

53) – which is the basic idea of existentialism. Eugene Webb quotes Robert M. Adams who called Ibsen “a perfectly destructive author” expressing “discontent with the human condition itself” (Adams 1957: 422). Vigdis Ystad is also one of those who prefer not to regard Ibsen as a sociologist or a moralist: “By presenting so-called demonic characters from quite different historical epochs, Ibsen shows that the issue or problem of freedom and self-actualization is not contingent upon a particular configuration of society at a particular time” (Ystad 1997: 151).

I prefer to be careful with supporting any extreme interpretation because I believe Ibsen was as much concerned with general human questions as with problems of particular society in particular time. It is therefore quite possible to regard his works from both perspectives. I have chosen the existential perspective because it gives a more universal understanding of literary works regardless epoch, geography and other social-historical conditions. This broader perspective allows me to conceive themes and motifs of the given plays as vital and topical today.

I have discovered that among scholars regarding Ibsen from the existential point of view there are yet few who pay attention to boredom as a sign of an existential crisis. One of the exceptions is the Norwegian scholar Ellen Mortensen. In her article “A kjede seg til dode” (1996) Hedda’s boredom is regarded as the main tone of her tragedy: “Hedda feels the pain of existence sometimes as claustrophobia, sometimes as boredom and loathing”¹⁶ (Mortensen 1996: 29). The scholar reads this boredom as existential, caused by loss of meaning in Hedda’s life: “For Hedda the tragic manifests itself in the feeling of loathing, which is a state of mind where all meaning dissolves”¹⁷. (ibid: 29). Mortensen’s basic assumption is that *Hedda Gabler* is not only a drama about modern woman as a social and moral figure, but also a play that raises existential questions (ibid: 28). However, Ellen Mortensen’s further interpretation is based on Freud’s psychoanalysis theory rather than existential ideas. That approach is not crucial for my reading of Ibsen’s plays.

Vigdis Ystad in her analysis of Ibsen’s rebellious women considers it necessary to emphasize that “Hedda is bored” (Ystad 1997: 148). However, she does not look closer at boredom as a motif of Hedda’s actions and does not try to recover the deep undermeaning of it. Unlike Ystad, John M. Solensten in his article “Time and tragic rhythm in Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler” (1969) assumes that “to the degree that it is a tragedy, *Hedda Gabler* is a tragedy of boredom” (Solensten 1969: 315). He associates Hedda’s fight against boredom with a conflict with time. This interpretation is fair in many regards; however, I suppose there are far more undertones standing for Hedda’s

boredom. It is surely more than just attempts “to kill time”, “an irrational fear of time” (ibid: 316).

Thus, the works mentioned above touch upon certain aspects of boredom in Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*; however, there is no profound research which would be completely devoted to the study of existential boredom in Ibsen’s plays.

There are no in-depth researches on the boredom motif in Chekhov’s plays either, even though it is such a frequent motif of his drama and prose that it can hardly be overlooked. After having seen *Uncle Vanya* performed in 1899, Lev Tolstoy complained that it was a play in which nothing really happened from beginning to end. Indeed, at first sight Chekhov’s plays might look very undramatic. “Bored, bored, bored” is the characters’ mantra. “Like no other writer Chekhov knew how to tell about boredom and emptiness of life”¹⁸, – argues the Russian critic Vladimir Linkov (Linkov 1995: 7).

Boredom is indeed not an easy theme. As Svendsen points out, it is “a challenging artistic topic, with most of the literary presentations of it having a tendency to be just as dull as their subject matter” (Svendsen 2005: 64). Nevertheless, Chekhov succeeds to depict a boring life in a very gripping way – perhaps because characters’ everyday little tragedies echo audience’s experience. The killing spread of boredom is one of the key motifs in most of his works. That is why it is striking that scholars did not pay sufficient attention to it.

In the course of my research work I had to admit that in relation to boredom it was truly hard to choose an appropriate perspective on it. Boredom might be regarded from sociological, psychological, historical, existential and many other points of view, and most often it is not easy to distinguish between those. What contributes more to the feeling of deep boredom: unfortunate social conditions or personality? Does a person feel bored because he does not fit in the society? Is it particular circumstances that suppress the self, or maybe self-actualization is a prerogative and responsibility of no-one else but an individual limited only by his own inertness and lack of motivation? In my research I will to some extent discuss this puzzling question, but will not try to give a simple answer to it sharing Svendsen’s opinion:

I do not believe, however, that a clear distinction can be made between psychological and social aspects when dealing with a phenomenon such as boredom, and a reductive sociology is just as untenable as a psychologism (Svendsen 2005: 12).

Nevertheless, I do not think that a universal overall perspective is possible either, and it is not my objective to reach it. In my research I will attempt to remain on the psychological and existential levels of understanding boredom. Especially when it comes to gender issues I would not like to delve into sociological speculation on Ibsen's and Chekhov's characters because this perspective is already well discussed¹⁹.

My research method will be close reading and comparative text analysis. The text analysis will be based on the main principle of Gadamer's Hermeneutics: understanding is always an interpretation; it is not a merely reproductive but a very productive process that gives rise to subjective opinions (Gadamer 1975). Hence I would like to emphasize that my research is nothing but my subjective interpretation of Ibsen's and Chekhov's selected dramatic works which is not the only possible and far from exhaustive.

While thinking over the structure of my work I faced some serious problems. Boredom is indeed such a complex phenomenon that it is truly hard to conduct a well-structured research on it which would not seem somewhat speculative and simplifying. After having considered several ways of doing it I eventually decided to sort out my ideas not by plays or particular characters and scenes, but rather by certain existential categories to which boredom is closely related. I will start with giving my understanding of boredom (which is a purely theoretical part of my research) and then continue with performing an analysis of the boredom motif in Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays with respect to romanticism and meaning withdrawal, work and love, and finally time and place. I will finish with discussing different ways the protagonists choose to overcome existential boredom.

2. Existential boredom – concept, history, roots

Before I start to discuss boredom in Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays I would like to explain what kind of boredom I will talk about. Lars Svendsen in his book *A Philosophy of Boredom* (2005) calls boredom for "fundamental existential experience" (Svendsen 2005: 11) and quotes the Norwegian professor of philosophy Jon Hellesnes: "What can possibly be more existentially disturbing than boredom?" (Hellesnes 1994: 15).

However, Svendsen stresses that he refers to a specific kind of boredom in his research. He borrows Martin Doehlemann's typology and distinguishes between two forms of boredom: *situative* and *existential*. According to this conception, situative boredom is caused by certain sum of circumstances while existential boredom feels like soul emptiness, vacuity of mind. More precisely, "a way of distinguishing between situative and existential boredom would be to say that while situative boredom contains a longing for something that is desired, existential boredom contains a longing for any desire at all" (Svendsen 2005: 43). Svendsen mentions also Gustave Flaubert who distinguished between 'common boredom' (*ennui commun*) and 'modern boredom' (*ennui moderne*) (Flaubert 1976) – which broadly speaking corresponds to Doehlemann's distinction between situative and existential boredom.

A similar conception belongs to Patricia Meyer Spacks who uses, however, different terms: she argues that, while *boredom* is usually seen as a temporary and trivial state, *ennui* is often characterized as "a state of the soul defying remedy, an existential perception of life's futility" (Spacks 1995: 27). In my thesis I will discuss exactly the latter type of boredom – existential boredom as I choose to call it. In its extreme form the phenomenon of existential boredom overlaps with Heidegger's "profound boredom" (*Langeweile*). When this kind of boredom strikes, it completely paralyzes one's will power and draws everything into "a strange indifference" (Heidegger 1976: 110). "In the profound form of boredom, – Svenden further specifies, – I am bored by boredom itself – I am completely attuned by boredom" (Svendsen 2005: 121).

Svendsen notes that

...situative and existential boredom have different symbolic modes of expression, or rather: while situative boredom is expressed via yawning, wriggling in one's chair, stretching out one's arms and legs, etc., profound existential boredom is more or less devoid of expression. While the body language of situative boredom seems to signal that one can cast off this yoke, squirm oneself free and move on, it is as if the lack of expression in existential boredom contains an implicit instinct that it cannot be overcome by any act of will. To the extent that there is a clear form of expression for profound boredom, it is via behaviour that radical and breaks new ground, negatively indicating boredom as its prerequisite (ibid: 42-43).

For instance, in both Lovborg's and Hedda's case we indeed see an example of destructive behaviour, but apart from these indications, Ibsen's and Chekhov's

characters often express their existential boredom *verbally*. In my research this direct verbal expression will be analyzed with special attention paid.

There is one more important thing about existential boredom that makes a conceptual difference. It is the kind of boredom that always implies loss of meaning in one's life. Lars Svendsen claims: "Boredom is not a question of idleness, but of *meaning*" (ibid: 34). In other words, Svendsen considers boredom equal to "meaning withdrawal". He argues that human ability to reflection inevitably results in craving for meaning:

Human beings are addicted to meaning. We all have a great problem: our lives must have some sort of content. We cannot bear to live our lives without some sort of content that we can see as constituting a meaning. Meaninglessness is boring... Boredom can be understood as a discomfort which communicates that the need for meaning is not being satisfied. In order to remove this discomfort, we attack the symptoms rather than the disease itself, and search for all meaning-surrogates (ibid: 30).

Indeed, it is enough to refer to the religion history in order to understand that seeking meaning has always been a crucial issue for people.

A deep phenomenological analysis of boredom and its relation to meaning can be found in Heidegger's course of lectures of 1929-1930. According to Heidegger, boredom is a privileged fundamental mood because it leads us directly into the very problem complex of being and time. He argues that the most crucial metaphysical questions can arise only in the mood of boredom. Philosophy seems to be born in the nothingness of boredom. When the meaning of human life is gone, it is the task of boredom to draw attention to this (Heidegger 1995).

Elisabeth Goodstein has a similar perspective in her research on boredom: "Even in its most quotidian manifestations, – she claims, – boredom embodies a specifically modern crisis of meaning" (Goodstein 2005: 5). This statement contains a very important word that might raise many questions – *modern*. Is existential boredom a special modern phenomenon? Are there any particular social symptoms that make writers develop this motif?

There are grounds to believe that the appearance of the boredom motif was not accidental and, as we know, was about to get more frequent in existentialists literature. I started my thesis with the statement that boredom became epidemic in our epoch, and that was one of the reasons why this "malady" aroused my interest. Indeed, the very

phenomenon of boredom seems to get more widespread in modern times. A number of philosophers link it to modernity: Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Patricia Meyer Spacks, Elizabeth S. Goodstein, Antony Giddens, Lars Svendsen, etc. For instance, Martin Heidegger defined boredom as a fundamental mood of modernity (Heidegger 1995). Similarly, Walter Benjamin sees boredom not simply as crucially related to modernity, but as perhaps the quintessential experience of modern life (Benjamin 1999). That leads to the assumption that boredom has mostly external roots – certain conditions of the particular society make people experience their life as dull and plain.

Supporting certain ideas of the mentioned philosophers I believe that the concept of boredom is relatively new and concurrent with the period of modernity. For instance, Svendsen traces the history of the concept “boredom” back to the original notion *acedia*, which is mainly mentioned by Christian writers of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. He explains the main differences between these two similar concepts: *acedia* is a morally charged concept which denotes a mood to be found among restricted elite, while *boredom* describes a psychological state attacking all modern society. It is important to keep in mind that the moral condemnation of *acedia* as a grievous sin is due not only to the fact that all other sins sprang from it, but that it also contained a rejection of God and of Creation.

According to Svendsen, whereas pre-modern societies certainly knew sloth in the form of “*acedia*”, boredom – as we know it today – appears to be directly linked with modernity: only in modernity it became a phenomenon which involves all aspects of life at all social levels. In other words, Svendsen claims that although certain forms of boredom had existed long ago, it is existential boredom that has become “a typical phenomenon of modernity” (Svendsen 2005: 11), “the ‘privilege’ of modern man” (ibid: 21).

Indeed, despite our sense of boredom as a universal condition, most scholars (Svendsen, Goodstein, Spacks) agree that the concept itself is quite new. A brief linguistic analysis seems to prove this fact. The English verb “to bore” dates back to the mid-XVIII century and the word “boredom” appeared only in the XIX century. The Danish “kedsomhed” is registered in the XVII century, and it is interesting to note that “the standard dictionary of the Norwegian language (*Norsk Riksmålsordbok*) does not mention any earlier occurrence of “kjedsomhet” than in the works of Ibsen and Amalie Skram” (ibid: 24).

As to the Russian word “скуча” (skuka), Terence Wade claims that it is recorded in dictionaries since 1704 (Wade 1996). Along with Russian scholars (such as Vasmer, Preobrazhensky, Shansky) he supposes that this word is cognate with the dialect word “кучать” (to grieve). Originally it probably came from the onomatopoeic “куча” (cf “кукушка” cuckoo) and meant “to make a monotonous sound, to tire, to annoy”. It is also remarkable that in modern Russian language the verb “скучать” (skuchat’) has two main meanings: 1. to be/feel bored; 2. to miss someone or something. This second meaning gives us an idea of existential longing for fulfillment – craving for something that one once had, but lost, and therefore one feels some sort of nostalgia and boredom.

The question of the particular period in history when the modern form of boredom appeared is not an idle inquiry at all. For *when* leads to the next core question – *why*. A constant longing for new experiences seems to be one of the main reasons for boredom in the age of modernity. As Elisabeth S. Goodstein puts it:

In time when the drives to novelty and innovation, speed and progress that have always defined modernity have become the foundation of a process of continuously accelerating transformation, boredom haunts the Western world. It appears as both cause and effect of this universal process – both as the disaffection with the old that drives the search for change and as the malaise produced by living under the permanent speed-up (Goodstein 2005: 1).

Thus, Goodstein finds it challenging to establish a cause-and-effect relation in examining the connection between boredom and modernity. This relation is indeed hard to define. Discussing modernity she most often refers to the XIX century.

Svendsen in his attempts to answer the questions *when and why* refers to the Romantic era. He suggests the following:

I do not assert that there is any clear, sharp break at any point in history, but insist that boredom is not thematized to any *major* extent before the Romantic era. With the advent of Romanticism, boredom becomes, so to speak, democratized and finds a broad form of expression (Svendsen 2005: 21).

Thus, Svendsen links the increase of boredom to romanticism – romantic state of mind that makes an individual disappointed and unsatisfied no matter what happens.

Reflecting on romanticism Svendsen refers to the particular place and period in history – German Romanticism of the late XVIII century.

Perhaps it is fair that boredom in its modern form became epidemic then and there, but it could hardly embrace the whole society. Therefore I prefer to look at boredom as an individual issue. Errol Durbach discussing “The Great Ennui” of Emma Bovary and the women in *The Lady from the Sea* argues that even though they cannot see it themselves, their unhappiness is yet related to the larger cultural issues and a European malaise. However, later he admits that Ibsen’s emphasis is “on psychic rather than social analysis – romanticism as a potentially dangerous affliction of the soul, no less prevalent in the 1880s than in the 1980s...” (Durbach 1982: 155). Accordingly, in my research I will use the concept of small-‘r’ romanticism, or idealism, rather than Romanticism as a particular epoch or an artistic and intellectual movement. Romanticism as a personal characteristic implies dissatisfaction with the reality and longing for something unachievable. It is no wonder that idealistic aspirations might give rise to boredom, deepen it and devalue everyday life.

The romantic demand of life to be interesting and a general craving for meaning are obviously closely related. Life must be “full” – and that implies – filled with existential value: a point, a general idea, a goal. This spiritual need for one’s life to have content is an individual feature, but ways of satisfying this need might vary from epoch to epoch.

A life meaning apparently can be supplied by God, traditions or ourselves. The question of subjective meaning (provided by ourselves) is yet to be discussed. First let’s see what happened with religion and tradition in the period of modernity. Rationalization and industrialization of society resulted in revaluation of “eternal” values. For Giddens, religion and tradition are closely connected, and he believes that modern life undermines both of them. He claims, in other words, that modern society is a post-traditional and post-religious society (Giddens 1990). There are no longer unconditional norms and values, nothing is certain: “Modernity effectively involves the institutionalization of doubt” (ibid: 176). Svendsen focusing on boredom as a modern phenomenon makes similar assumptions:

My aim has been to emphasize boredom as a major problem in modernity. Boredom becomes widespread when traditional structures of meaning disappear. In modernity the subject is released from tradition and has to seek new meaning for itself (Svendsen 2005: 153).

Similarly, Goodstein argues that modern boredom is “the plague of the enlightened subject, whose skeptical distance from the certainties of faith, tradition, sensation renders the immediacy of quotidian meaning hollow or inaccessible” (Goodstein 2005: 4). Having refused traditions and religion, an individual becomes thereby responsible for his own values.

These ideas are by no means new and were expressed by existentialist philosophers long before Giddens’ and Goodstein’s social studies. Unlike them, Svendsen builds some of his conclusions upon discussion of the literary and philosophical movement of existentialism, primarily discussing Heidegger’s philosophy.

Indeed, existentialism tends to regard human beings as subjects in an indifferent, objective, often ambiguous, and “absurd” universe in which meaning is not provided by the natural order, but rather can be created by human beings’ actions and interpretations. If there is no God (“God is dead”) or tradition one could serve for, the individual becomes primary – and responsible for everything. There is nothing left but self-realization and individual values. As Svendsen puts it:

There is no one collective meaning in life anymore, a meaning that it is up to the individual to participate in. Nor is it that easy to find an own meaning in life, either. The meaning that most people embrace is self-realization as such, but it is not obvious what type of self is to be realized, nor what should possibly result from it (Svendsen 2005: 32).

In other words, in modern conditions we create our own values and beliefs and thus make them relative, not absolute. Apparently if a person fails to find any subjective meaning of life, he suffers from existential boredom.

Discussion of existential ideas brings Svendsen back to romanticism again:

Romanticism is already existentialism and existentialism is incorrigibly Romantic. Of course, all of this is intimately connected to historical and political developments. With the emergence of the bourgeoisie and death of God, man no longer sets out to serve something or someone else, but seeks to fulfill himself and gain his own happiness. The adventurousness of the Romantic is an aesthetic reaction to the monotony of the bourgeois world. The human subject is to be the source of all meaning and value... The Romantic self becomes a solipsistic self, one that has no belief in anything outside

itself – for there cannot be any meaning other than what it has produced itself (ibid: 70).

I support the common opinion that existential boredom is rather natural for post-traditional and post-religious society. The XX century is sometimes called “an epoch of absurd”, a century of “existential vacuum” (according to Victor Frankl’s term) when a great number of people started feeling meaninglessness of their lives, failure to find any positive meaning because old values and traditions are ruined while new ones are discredited. But as early as in the XIX century boredom comes into being in a world of radical changes – when urbanization, industrialization, and secularization were transforming traditional societies into modern ones and raising new questions about the meaning of human life. However, there is an important point I would like to stress again. In my opinion, existential boredom is not *exclusively* related to particular social circumstances. Modern society may provoke increasing boredom, but in fact I suppose this state is something more than just a response to certain modern conditions.

To make my point clearer I would like to refer to chronically bored Hedda Gabler. At first sight it seems like Hedda feels trapped in a narrow middle-class world. Her life is idle and aimless and she gets more and more aware of that. She seems to miss the luxurious aristocratic style she is used to, being a General’s daughter. Current conditions appear to be too “low” for her. In support of this conjecture Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests that existential boredom (“ennui” in her terms) has class and gender grounds. She assumes it is more likely to be experienced by those who can delegate the tedium of mundane tasks to their servants, and have the leisure time to dwell on unfulfilled promise (Spacks 1995). In such social conditions there seem to be no way for self-realization.

Toril Moi has a similar view: “Hedda’s boredom expresses her sense that she lives in a world in which nothing at all is worthy of her energy, her interest, her love”, – writes the scholar, by “world” surely meaning a particular “society” (Moi 2006: 319). Georg Brandes, among others, developed an idea of the society being suppression for individuality (Brandes 1891). As already mentioned, that interpretation of the play as Ibsen’s criticism of society and a fight for social reforms has been very popular for a long time. I will return to Hedda Gabler in other chapters while dealing with certain existential aspects of boredom. Here I would only like to note that Hedda never clearly states what she really wants and what ambitions apart from a hazy “beautiful life” she has. It is indeed extremely hard to imagine certain conditions where Hedda would be

happy enough. Something restless in Hedda's character makes me suggest that whatever happens she will not be satisfied. This is an important feature of existential boredom: constant dissatisfaction, longing for something undefined and seeing no way for self-actualization.

Reading Chekhov has always been contradictory too. In his time the play *Three Sisters* was conceived as a realization of modern society's sentiments. The audience concluded that Chekhov's characters were "heroes of our time". L. E. Bushkanets points out that the play *Three Sisters* reflected indeed many features of the Russian intelligentsia mentality – namely, pessimism, passivity, aloofness (Bushkanets 2002: 314).

Later interpretations of Chekhov's works became probably even more ambiguous and socially determined given the political situation in Soviet Union. Some of them are highly speculative due to the censorship. Soviet critics often found in Chekhov's plays signs of coming changes. A. D. Stepanov – a modern scholar – notes:

Interpretation of Chekhov as a writer showing abnormality of Russian lifestyle (with the logical conclusion of radical changes required) was typical for most Soviet scholars, including such deep ones as G. A. Byaly, A. P. Skaftymov and N. Y. Berkovsky²⁰ (Stepanov 2005: 12).

For instance, the Soviet scholar G. P. Berdnikov regarded *Three Sisters* as "a reflection of the pre-revolutionary social situation in the country"²¹ (Berdnikov 1957: 175). Berdnikov argued that the play *Three Sisters* was characterized by Chekhov's "increased critical attitude to modern realities and Russian intelligentsia" and by "the feeling of radical changes coming"²² (Berdnikov 1957: 163). Baron Tuzenbakh says in the first act: "The time has come, an avalanche is moving down on us and a great storm's brewing that'll do us all a power of good. It's practically on top of us already and soon it's going to blast out of our society all the laziness, complacency, contempt for work, rottenness and boredom" (Chekhov 1976: 76). These words were naturally interpreted from the "revolutionary" perspective. Berdnikov assumes that Chekhov condemns his characters' weakness and lack of will power – qualities that lead to overall degradation.

The above-mentioned critic Shakh-Azizova, having conducted a more profound research on Chekhov's plays in relation to the modern Western drama, sees the roots of certain pessimistic moods in *decadence* – a general feeling of decline that invades all

from politics to inner life of the person. Shakh-Azizova believes that all those processes in life and arts were due to “the anti-bourgeois tendency”²³ started at the turn of the century (Shakh-Azizova 1966: 9).

I do agree certain decadent trends are perhaps more characteristic for the age of modernity than for other epochs. However, in general, merely social interpretations are quite speculative in my eyes and reflect the ideological priorities critics followed at this or that particular period of time. I share Kataev’s view: “It’s obvious, after all, that specifically “Soviet” interpretations are no more than particular examples of misinterpreting Chekhov” (Kataev 2002: Xiii).

Nevertheless, certain modern Chekov scholars, having no ideological restrictions, still tend to give a very broad socio-historical perspective on his works. Margarita Odesskaya in her article “Ibsen, Strindberg, Cechov v svete koncepcii vyrozhdenija Maksa Nordau” (2007) discusses the three dramatists in the light of Nordau’s concept of degeneration. According to that conception, at the turn of the century all the civilized mankind was sick. All the society was regarded as a hospital, and all the illnesses – psychopathy, hysteria, superiority complex, erotomania, aestheticism – were found in degenerate literature of the “fin de siecle” epoch. In other words, Nordau’s basic idea was that decadence art both *reflected* and *influenced* degeneration of society caused by rapid urbanization and other social phenomena of that period.

According to the scholar, this theme of downfall and downgrading is present in many Ibsen’s and Chekhov’s plays. However, Odesskaya argues that it is not socio-biological determinism that makes their works “fairy tales of eternity” (Odesskaya 2007: 224). Ibsen and Chekhov reflected in their plays overwhelming pain common for most people – disappointment about invalidation of the harmonic world view. This idea of disharmony is more general and philosophical than a simple sociological interpretation.

‘Decadence’, ‘the age of modernity’, ‘post-traditional society’, ‘degeneration of society’ are the notions that could provide us with quite misleading and too generalized explanations. For instance, Anthony Giddens argues that in the post-traditional society, self-identity is not inherited or static; rather, it becomes a reflexive process – something we continuously work and reflect on. It is not a set of observable characteristics of a moment, but an account of an individual’s life (Giddens 1991: 54). While in earlier, traditional societies people were provided with particular social roles, in the

post-traditional society we are usually forced to create them ourselves. As Giddens puts it:

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour (ibid: 70).

That seems fair in general terms, but I would say that the flaw in Giddens' and other sociologists' conclusions is exactly its' over-generalization. It is important to take into consideration that individuals perceive social changes in different ways. Some get more reflexive and start searching for self-identity, while others just keep their social traditional roles without reflecting on them or craving for more. The examples of fully satisfied characters in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* are Tesman and Mrs Elvsted and in Chekhov's *Three Sisters* – Natasha. They are living "here and now" and are not concerned with existential questions. In other words, they live in harmony with themselves while Hedda is constantly torn by inner conflicts. Therefore my research is based on the assumption that existential boredom is an individual experience and just partly caused by certain changes in society.

Moreover, I suppose the lack of communication, which Giddens also mentions as a typical trait of modern society, is exactly caused by that difference between individuals. Modernity has had certain effect on some persons while others seem to keep living in a "pre-modern" world. It is then no surprise that people belonging to those two groups do not always understand each other. That leads to social disunity, a growing gap between people and extreme isolation of those who do not fit in society. I believe loneliness always accompanies existential boredom. "Boredom isolates, individuates", – notes Elisabeth S. Goodstein (Goodstein 2005: 1). That will be further discussed in the Chapter 5 of my thesis.

Thus, as I have tried to show, the question about society and the self is extremely complicated. On one hand it is tempting to say that Ibsen and Chekhov were more concerned with general human questions than with problems of particular society in particular time, and that is exactly what makes them classics. On the other hand, it is undeniable that what they considered as universal questions was perhaps a feature of the particular epoch they lived in.

Gordon McVay giving in his research of *Three Sisters* a universal existential perspective nevertheless emphasizes that it is a "realistic play" and "its characters are

undoubtedly products of the society and age in which they live” (McVay 1995: 71). He admits that this play might as well be regarded from the social point of view:

Readers seeking to approach the text as a source of historical or sociological information are free to see therein a reflection of contemporary Russian society and psychology. It is perfectly possible to regard numerous statements and gestures as politically and socially revealing. The Prozorovs and their friends might, for instance, be interpreted as ineffectual specimens or victims of a moribund class system, which has doomed them to useless inertia and genteel pretentiousness (ibid: 71).

However, he adds, “Chekhov himself would have recoiled from such a simplistic and blinkered analysis. (...) Although by no means indifferent to the welfare of individuals and society, he refused to reduce everything to historical determinism and social categories” (ibid: 71). In his discussion of the three sisters McVay comes to an interesting conclusion that seems fair to me: “In their preoccupation with the eternal or insoluble questions, they are representatives of ‘mankind’ rather than narrowly and exclusively ‘Russian’” (McVay 1995: 78). The same is valid for Ibsen’s characters. Hedda might be interpreted as a victim of a particular society, but in my view she is as much a victim of herself.

I think existential boredom could be discussed on both social and individual levels. I share Goodstein’s opinion that while studying boredom as a modernity phenomenon “...it is necessary to think the relation between boredom as an experience of subjective crisis and boredom as an empirically conditioned social phenomenon” (Goodstein 2005: 5). Boredom is indeed extremely ambiguous and complex: it surely has objective preconditions, and at the same time it is a deeply personal – subjective – experience. In line with this idea Svendsen argues: “It is impossible to make any clear distinction between the respective contributions made by the subject and object to boredom, because the emptiness of the subject and object is so interwoven” (Svendsen 2005: 44).

In *any* kind of society, regardless of epoch, there are a certain number of outsiders, nonconformists, rebels – in other words, those who do not really fit. The individual and society can be regarded as two pieces of a puzzle that either match or do not match. In my research of the plays I will discuss primarily the latter kind of individuals that live in disharmony with themselves and others, and I will focus on the existential and psychological level of their inner conflicts. Gospodinova argues that in Ibsen’s and Chekhov’s plays “the character’s conflict with society and life at some

point always gets transformed into an inner conflict”²⁴ (Gospodinova 1999: 143). I would add that these conflicts are so bound and merged that it is truly hard to separate them.

My understanding of the existential boredom roots is concordant with Goodstein’s view:

In boredom there is no distinguishing in here from out there, for the world in its failure to engage collapses into an extension of the bored subject who empties out in the vain search for an interest, a pleasure, a meaning. Self and world collapse in a nihilistic affirmation that nothing means, nothing pleases, nothing matters (Goodstein 2005: 1).

This resembles Heidegger’s idea about boredom being a clear evidence of existence wholeness where subject and object are merged together:

Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and men and oneself along with it into a remarkable indifference. This boredom reveals being as a whole (Heidegger 1998: 87).

I therefore believe that boredom is not exclusively caused by internal or external reasons. It is a combination of various factors that matters. The relation between modernity and the self seems to be very ambiguous and hard to define. Any simple conclusion would be too speculative, and any single-valued interpretation would be wrong. After all, it is not an objection of my research to find out what is primary – society or the self. However, the choice of existential perspective inevitably directs me to the self. I will try to avoid the social-historical perspective though I do not claim that this perspective is unfair or uninteresting.

3. Romanticism and loss of meaning in Ibsen’s and Chekhov’s plays

As I discussed in the previous chapter, boredom is both cause and effect of an existential crisis: “If boredom strikes hard, one is inevitably brought to an existential

borderline situation where one has to question the nature of one's entire existence" (Svendsen 2005: 153). It indeed seems to be true that boredom increases our self-reflection (or self-reflection increases boredom?) and makes ask the most essential questions. In boredom a person is left alone with himself, nothing distracts him – and the question about personal meaning in life comes in no time.

Svendsen quotes the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa: "Tedium is not the disease of being bored because there's nothing to do, but the more serious disease of feeling that there's nothing worth doing" (Pessoa 2002: 95). This expression emphasizes that the problem of boredom is always a problem of individual perception. If we fail to attach a subjective meaning to things, we will sink into endless boredom and passivity. This is exactly what I will call "existential boredom" and this is what I assume some of Ibsen's and Chekhov's protagonists suffer from.

Characters experiencing existential boredom and complaining about it tend to generalize a lot. Now and again, while keeping everyday conversations, they refer to "life" or "meaning of life". In *Uncle Vanya* the word "life" (жизнь) is used 46 times, in *Three Sisters* – 67 times! For Hedda it is less typical to dwell on philosophical issues, but occasionally she also tries to "sum up" her life experience. Discussing her husband's career options she suddenly "rises impatiently" and exclaims in despair:

HEDDA. Yes, there we have it! It's these paltry circumstances I've landed up in...! That's what makes life so pitiful! So positively ludicrous!... Because that's what it is (Ibsen 1966: 212).

Life is experienced as something estranged, fatal and separate from one's will and wishes. It seems like Hedda totally forgets that it was nobody but herself who had chosen those circumstances that she finds trapping and suffocating. The same idea of some kind of resistless power driving people's life can be found in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*:

OLGA. Nothing ever works out as we want it²⁵ (Chekhov 1976: 135).

The feeling of fatalism contributes to the characters' apathy and makes boredom grow. Fatalism does not allow them to actively search for a subjective meaning and create their own values. Things are what they are, and the characters often feel powerless to change anything.

I would like to bring into focus the most bored of Ibsen's protagonists – Hedda Gabler. Throughout the play she suffers from this devastating feeling and repeatedly complains she is annoyed and “bored to death”. She has nothing but one thing “to pass the time with” (Ibsen 1966: 201) – her pistols, which symbolize in my eyes a flirtation with death – an existential game. In the text we cannot find clear verbal evidence of her search for meaning, but she is with no doubt in some kind of inner crisis.

At times it seems like boredom in Hedda's case is not equivalent to indifference and stagnation. She is full of mixed emotions and uncertain ambitions, but is unable to put them in some kind of direction. Hedda feels that dullness of her present pitiable life kills her passions and she desperately tries to avoid it. But what is she searching for as an antidote to boredom? She sees the opposition to her dull existence in what she calls freedom, beauty and power. However, all those concepts are quite abstract and romantic. Svendsen notes that romantic boredom

...is characterized by not knowing what one is searching for, other than an unspecified, boundless fullness of life. It is rooted in the search for the infinite, and as Friedrich Schlegel pointed out ‘whoever desires the infinite is unaware of what he desires’ (Svendsen 2005: 60).

Accordingly, Leo Tolstoy regarded boredom as a desire for desires, and Schopenhauer described it as a “tame longing without any particular object” (Schopenhauer 1986: 241). Indeed, being unsatisfied with her life, Hedda cannot clearly express what kind of a different life she wants, what this “brighter” life should be like and how to reach it. In fact, boredom is so devastating that it deprives her of any specific desires and intentions. Brack suggests she has to find some vocation that would attract her. She reacts: “Lord knows what sort of thing that would be” (Ibsen 1966: 212). Unclear – and thus unachievable – goals surely lead not to creativeness, but to viciousness, destructiveness and self-destruction. As Svendsen insists once again: “this very yearning for the infinite, for the absolute, for Meaning, only makes boredom worse” (Svendsen 2005: 60).

Another Ibsen's character who is lost in “romantic boredom” is Bolette in *The Lady from the Sea*. If we look closer at her wishes we can see that her dreams are very general and unspecific. She wants to see not a particular country, but “the world”, and she wants to study not a particular science, but “something”:

BOLETTE. To get away... to see the world... to learn something... really thoroughly!
All these things that have seemed such a beautiful, impossible dream...!
ARNHOLM. All this can become a reality. You only have to decide (Ibsen 1966: 111).

Bolette accepts Arnholm's proposal being lost in her airy dreams and not thinking of everyday life with a man she does not love. Thus, she decides to sacrifice her freedom to some unknown "sunnier life" being quite uncertain what it implies. Now she looks happy ("Oh, I could laugh and cry for joy! For sheer happiness!"), but her future happiness is doubtful. If Bolette believes that her life is someone else's task, it is unlikely to work out right: "I shall live! You promised me" (ibid: 114). By telling this she shifts the responsibility for her happiness on Arnholm's shoulders and thus makes it truly fragile.

The question about happiness is of course very ambiguous. For certain characters it is important to strive for personal independent meaning in life, but for others – perhaps those who still believe that all values should be ready-made – it is better to rely on somebody else and put all happiness in someone else's hands. That relieves them of existential responsibility and makes them more or less satisfied with life. Perhaps Bolette will be happy enough, but it is quite possible that she will not stop there, that her needs – being so undefined and vague – will never be satisfied. "The pursuit of happiness implies boredom's threat", – argues Patricia Meyer Spacks in her research on boredom (Spacks 1995: 252). That can be interpreted as follows: our romantic dreams and constant seeking for "full and true" happiness will always leave us bored, discontented with the current life situation and deprive us of engagement in what is going on around us here and now.

In much the same manner Hedda's romanticism makes boring reality beyond all bearing. She expects life to be amazing and people to take extraordinary actions, and this romantic vision of the world leads her to constant dissatisfaction and frustration. She makes up her own idealistic scenario for Lovborg and truly hopes he will manage to get control over himself and come back "with vine-leaves in his hair". Hedda's wish to find Dionysus in Lovborg is her attempt to make a romantic dream come true. Her manipulative actions are not just a whim of a spoilt child. Through Lovborg she tries to realize what she does not dare to do herself. In spite of her passionate nature, she is full of various fears and restrictions. Hedda is not ready to be an actor, but prefers to be a "stage director" creating her ideal world.

Certain scholars have already tried to find the motivation of Hedda's actions in her "a kind of thwarted idealism" (Webb 1970: 54) and "a catastrophic dissonance between ideal... and existence" (Serck 2001: 55). Idealism and romanticism could be read as synonymous in that context. The world does not meet Hedda's expectations, and disappointment comes gradually, but inevitably: "As the play goes on, she comes to realize that her ideal is only a dream, that it will never have any power in the real world" (Webb 1970: 55). At first Lovborg's death gives her inspiration, but then it turned into the greatest disappointment: his suicide is a kind of parody of her dreams. Her demands are high and her disillusion is accordingly great. Thus, romantic worldview, contempt for reality and lack of a subjective meaning in her life – all this results in boredom shadowing Hedda whatever happens.

Even though Hedda is not hunting for more and more devastating diversions, she is close to Lovborg in her craving for "the new". Perhaps one of her motives when getting married was a desire for a new experience, a new house and a new status – any kind of change in life. However, as Svendsen points out:

When one throws oneself at everything that is new, it is with a hope that the new will be able to have an individualizing function and supply life with a personal meaning; but everything new soon becomes old, and the promise of personal meaning is not always fulfilled – at least, not more than just for the time being. The new always quickly turns into routine, and then comes boredom... (Svendsen 2005: 45).

Indeed, Hedda just moved in a new house, but she already feels "a sort of odour of death, like a bouquet the day after a ball" (Ibsen 1966: 212). This house seems way too cramped and suffocating to her. When "the new" brings not a relief but another disappointment, Hedda is confronted with Nothing again. She returns to the empty everyday.

Everyday, routine, "the habitual" is a source of boredom. Toril Moi touches upon it in the context of Michael Fried's conception of "bad" and "good" everyday (Fried 2002: 159). He distinguishes between "the everyday considered as a sphere of potential meaning and redemption and the everyday considered as a routinized realm of inauthenticity, alienation, and boredom" (Moi 2006: 319). Moi argues that in *Hedda Gabler* Ibsen dramatically changes his representation of the everyday. In earlier plays (from *A Doll's House* to *The Lady from the Sea*) the everyday is represented as "the sphere where forvandling ("transformation") must be sought" (ibid: 318). Moi points

out that later the everyday becomes a negative force, and the most evident signal of this change of Ibsen's ideas is Hedda's "constant and intense sense of *boredom*" (ibid: 318). Indeed, Hedda's present everyday life is perceived by her as a deadlock where there is no hope for a refreshing change or a meaningful occupation.

I would like to stress again that in my eyes Hedda's failure to assimilate to the "everyday" and realize herself in the given conditions is not exclusively due to the change of social status or gender issues. Errol Durbach points out that Hedda was way too often portrayed as "a woman in whom poetry of life runs deep but whose channels of expression have been dammed by the society in which she lives, in whom idealism burns with a hard gem-like flame but which – thwarted by her status in the world – can only burn itself and others in an agony of frustration" (Durbach 1982: 34). I share Durbach's opinion that it is a simplification to explain Hedda's tragedy through suppression of the society:

It is becoming increasingly more difficult to release Hedda from the toils of Women's Liberation and restore her to the predicament from which there can be no liberation in this life. Her agony is not that of a thwarted power-hungry politician. It comes from the tragic sense... (ibid: 34).

Hedda does ignore established values, but I look at her provoking behaviour not as a conflict with the middle-class society of the XIX century, but as a more general act of self-actualization – a search for self-identity. Hedda's motives can hardly be explained by her idleness and having nothing to do in those particular circumstances she finds herself in. There is a lot to do, but there is *no point* in doing it.

Mary Graham Lund, reading Ibsen from the existential point of view, assumes that loss of meaning is the main source of tragedy in Ibsen's plays:

Tragedy comes to the Ibsenian hero through failure to recognize the true end and meaning of life... The shattering instant comes... when he realizes that his path leads to no goal (Lund 1960: 312).

In this regard *Hedda Gabler* is a tragedy of inanition. Hedda despises not only social conventions and obligations (marriage, mother's role, certain rules of decorum), but also the eternal value of love – perhaps the only thing that could make any life meaningful when the rest does not seem to be of value anymore: "Ugh... don't use this

glutinous word!” – she asks Brack when he mentions love (Ibsen 1966: 206). The aspect of love will be more particularly discussed later in my thesis.

I already pointed out above that being stuck in a dull life Hedda considers her boredom as something inevitable, even fatal – something coming from outside and suffocating her:

HEDDA. I’ve often thought there’s only one thing in the world I’m any good at.

BRACK. And what might that be, may I venture to ask?

HEDDA. Boring myself to death (Ibsen 1966: 213).

Those words sound both ironical and fatal in the light of later events. What I find extremely important is that Hedda sounds like she has no choice. In other translations it is even more obvious. She says there is only one thing in the world she has “any turn for” or “gift”. In the original text this line also shows how inevitable Hedda considers her boredom: “Mangen gang synes jeg at jeg bare har anlegg til en eneste ting i verden” (Ibsen 1898-1902: 431). Boredom is her damnation, a trap she is caught in.

Fatally, Hedda cannot help herself and seems to have no inner resources for fighting off boredom. George M. Wellwarth points out that in fact nothing stands for Hedda’s individualism, and thus pure egocentrism destroys her:

Hedda has no interests, except herself. Her isolation within herself is the reason for her failure as a human being. Isolation within the self is not necessarily bad when the self is interesting, but Hedda is a barren wasteland. She has no interests, no talents; only her beauty and the longing for a sensual appreciation of life (Wellwarth 1986: 95).

Indeed, Hedda is completely focused on herself, but the self is empty; as a result, she lacks potential to get rid of boredom and find a reason to live.

So she turns to people around her and seeks relief in meddling in their lives. According to Antonija Gospodinova, Hedda’s egocentrism is what distinguishes her from Chekhov’s protagonists:

Hedda has a fascinating extraordinary personality, she is depressed by platitude and mediocrity; it is unbearable for her to live a dull monotonous life. In this regard Hedda reminds Chekhov’s characters which are crippled by plain boring eventless life, surrounded by banalities and unable to realize their potential. However, what

distinguishes Hedda from them is her aggressive and cruel attitude to others²⁶ (Gospodinova 1999: 142).

Indeed, while Chekhovian characters' frustration manifests itself through quiet suffering and harmless complaints, Hedda tries to ruin others' lives as some kind of compensation for her own ruined life. Kierkegaard, "most epigrammatic and most profound of Western experts on boredom" (Spacks 1995: 233) considered boredom "the root of all evil," (Kierkegaard 1992: 228). Hedda's demonism, cynicism, cruelty and inability to sympathize ("I don't care about that", – says Hedda several times and means it numerous times) – all these are effects of her overwhelming boredom in one way or another. If happiness and splendid life are impossible, she needs tragedies as a fuel. Anything seems better than dullness. Tragic consequences of her actions appear to be refreshing for her.

Unlike Hedda who conveys her frustration through destructive behaviour, Chekhov's protagonists express more directly their longing for meaning. Feeling weak, dependant and suffering from inner disharmony, they constantly attempt to find themselves, to be reborn and finally answer the main question about their life importance. In Chekhov's prosaic work *The Story of an Unknown Man* the protagonist is presented from the moment he gets disappointed in his beliefs and asks himself a lot of existential questions: Who am I? What should I think about and what should I do? Where to go? What am I living for? That kind of insoluble questions puzzle nearly all Chekhov's characters. As the Russian critic V. Linkov puts it: "They have a common problem – they lack superior guiding life principles"²⁷ (Linkov 1995: 6), or a linking "general idea" as McVay chooses to call it (McVay 1995: 64).

The protagonists, feeling an existential vacuum, start to reflect a lot on philosophical issues. Sometimes they seem to be preoccupied with *general* life laws – the universal meaning of human life. Nevertheless they always end up searching for a *personal* meaning as soon as they realize that there are no rules that are valid for everybody.

In *Three Sisters* there is an interesting conversation that conveys this longing for meaning in the most obvious way. It starts with Tuzenbakh's supposition that neither universal nor personal meaning is possible to discover. It is simply beyond an individual's understanding and hidden in the secret laws of life:

TUZENBAKH. ...even in a million years life will still be just the same as ever. It doesn't change, it always goes on the same and follows its own laws. And those laws are none of our business. Or at least you'll never understand them. Think of the birds flying south for the winter, cranes for instance. They fly on and on and on, and it doesn't matter what ideas, big or small, they may have buzzing about inside their heads, they'll still keep on flying without ever knowing why they do it or where they're going. They fly on and on, and what if they do throw up a few philosophers? Let them keep their philosophy so long as they don't stop flying²⁸ (Chekhov 1976: 99).

However, Masha is definitely not satisfied with that view and continues to question the meaning:

MASHA. But what's the point of it all?

TUZENBAKH. The point? Look, it's snowing out there. What's the point of that?²⁹ (ibid: 100).

After a pause Masha puts her thoughts into words more clearly:

MASHA. I feel that man should have a faith or be trying to find one, otherwise his life just doesn't make sense. Think of living without knowing why cranes fly, why children are born or why there are stars in the sky. Either you know what you're living for, or else the whole thing's a waste of time and means less than nothing³⁰ (ibid: 100).

I think this need for faith does not imply a faith in strictly religious terms. It is not only about the universal meaning of human existence, but also about self-identity, some kind of a life dominant to follow. Otherwise life seems to pass in vain. In Masha's philosophical words we can find "either-or, the two poles where one is the absolute knowledge and the other one is the absolute indifference, 'less than nothing'"³¹ (Lapushin 2002: 24). This overpowering craving for Meaning creates an existential situation that inevitably leads to numerous disappointments.

Right after her passage about meaning Masha suddenly gives a quotation from Gogol's novella: "Life on this earth is no end of a bore, my friends!"³² (Chekhov 1976: 100). Thus, it might be interpreted as a confession that life devoid of meaning (or search for meaning) is unbearably boring.

In their search the three sisters go from hopes to disappointments and despair and then back to hopes. It is the most evident in the case of Irina, the youngest sister,

who seems to turn into another person within the play. Gordon McVay gives a concise description of this transformation:

When the curtain rises, on her twentieth birthday, she has an air of innocence. She longs naively for love, and work, and happiness, and a blissful return to Moscow – and, act by act, as the years pass, we see her face age and her hopes sag, as prose proves stronger than poetry and the real ousts the ideal. At times, Irina comes close to despair, especially in the third act, when she...feels she is sinking into a kind of abyss. By the end of the play, she regains some of her lost poise, but she will never know such innocence again (McVay 1995: 12).

Most romantic illusions are left behind, a meaning is not found, but the search must go on.

I would call Hedda's existential boredom more profound because she has given up searching for meaning. She does not find anything relevant in her life and ends up dying. The same is also true for Elena in *Uncle Vanya*, only we do not know what happens to her after she leaves. Those two women are in a way close to the episodic character Chebutykin who expresses total indifference throughout the play, and his motto is "Бcѣ павно!" ("it's all the same", "nothing matters"). In contrast, the three sisters are more concerned with meaning search. In a certain sense they may seem very passive, but if we look closer at their development throughout the play, we will see that they do their best to overcome an existential crisis. Even being rather disillusioned by the end of the play they still do not give up the search. They really *want to know* what it is all about:

OLGA. ...it feels as if we might find out before long what our lives and sufferings are for. If we could only know! If we could only know!³³ (Chekhov 1976: 139)

This refrain – if only we could know – is repeated four times and closes the play. It reveals a strong desire for making sense of life.

The conjunctive mood in Olga's words "If we could only know", according to Radislav Lapushin, means going back to reality through accepting impossibility of the final answer and absolute knowledge. However, the need for this knowledge remains undoubted. It is necessary to know the meaning of life, and it is impossible to know it (Lapushin 2002: 25). Suffering becomes bearable only with the belief that there is an ultimate – though yet unknown – reason for it:

IRINA [*puts her head on Olga's breast*]. What is all this for? Why all this suffering? The answer will be known one day, and then there will be no more mysteries left³⁴ (Chekhov 1976: 138-139).

Arthur Schopenhauer believed that boredom could serve as an evidence of the vanity of existence: "...for if life, in the desire for which our essence and existence consists, possessed in itself a positive value and real content, there would be no such thing as boredom: mere existence would fulfill and satisfy us" (Schopenhauer 2004: 53). Chekhov's characters in their attempt to overcome boredom strive to deny vanity of existence. When the three sisters say "if only we could know" they claim by that their absolute certainty that there *is* a meaning, only it is concealed and yet to be found. Being himself a non-believer, Chekhov wrote in his letter to V. S. Mirolyubov: "One ought to believe in God, but, if faith is absent, one shouldn't replace it by idle sensationalism, but instead seek and seek all by oneself, all alone with one's conscience"³⁵...

These Chekhov's thoughts are very close to the ideas of the Austrian "existential psychotherapist" Viktor Frankl, who believed that apart from Freudian "will to pleasure" and Nietzschean "will to power" the "most human of all human needs" was "will to meaning" (Frankl 2000: 139).

It is also crucial to note that people's search for meaning (or Meaning) is always a search for happiness, no matter how banal it might sound. The American sociologist David Allen Karp in his research on depression *Speaking of Sadness* (1997) retells an episode about Sigmund Freud who was once asked what people needed to be happy. The questioner of course expected a long, complicated answer reflecting Freud's years of deep reflection on the matter. His simple response, however, was "arbeiten und lieben", – work and love. Happy people feel connected to others at work and through their intimate relationships. When those connections are threatened, diminished, or broken, people suffer (Karp 1997: 178). Those who lack both things in their life – meaningful work and sustaining intimate ties – are the most vulnerable ones and are exposed to a severe existential crisis. In the next two chapters I will analyze the connection between the characters' existential boredom and the two fundamental existential values – work and love.

4. Boredom and work

The relation between work and boredom is complex. Work may both infect us with boredom and serve as a medicine against it. Indeed, some meaningful activities can save us from drowning in dullness and give a feeling of satisfaction with the work done, but what if one has to work only to survive, finding no pleasure or meaning in routine job? That might lead to total exhaustion and existential vacuum. Svendsen points out:

Work is often onerous, often without potential to promote any meaning in life. The answer to the question as to why people get bored does not lie in work or leisure on their own. One can have a lot of leisure without being noticeably bored and one can have only a little leisure and be bored to death (Svendsen 2005: 34).

The answer thus seems to lie in meaning.

Chekhov, like no other author, was interested in that dialectics. In both plays discussed here characters reflect a lot on work and idleness. Olga is the only one of the three sisters who works. She is complaining on and on and obviously unsatisfied with what she is doing. After four years of teaching work, Olga feels absolutely exhausted and old: “I’ve felt my youth and energy draining away drop by drop each day”³⁶ (Chekhov 1976: 74). She sees escape from her boring work in marriage and idleness. In contrast, Irina, taking no notice of her sister’s complaints, is dreaming about work life. At the beginning of the play she is convinced that hard work is the only way to make one’s life complete – to fill it with meaning and happiness:

IRINA. Today I woke up, got out of bed and had a wash. And then I suddenly felt as if everything in the world made sense, I seemed to know how to live. I know everything, dearest Doctor. Man should work and toil by the sweat of his brow, whoever he is – that’s the whole purpose and meaning of his life, his happiness and his joy³⁷ (ibid: 75).

Proclaiming her ideal of a hard work, she is innocently talking about something she has never tried. Indeed, she usually lies in bed till noon and has no cares.

Baron Tuzenbakh who admits that he has “never done a hand’s turn”³⁸ in his whole life supports that demagoguery:

TUZENBAKH. The time has come, an avalanche is moving down on us and a great storm's brewing that'll do us all a power of good. It's practically on top of us already and soon it's going to blast out of our society all the laziness, complacency, contempt for work, rottenness and boredom. I'm going to work and in twenty-five or thirty years' time everyone will work. Everyone!³⁹ (ibid: 76).

It is quite ironic that those grandiose thoughts are expressed by people who have never worked. Chebutykin interrupts this tirade by a surprising confession: "Well, I shan't for one"⁴⁰ (ibid: 76).

Irina insists that work can save everyone from boredom and glum thoughts: "We must work, work, work. That's why we're so miserable and take such a gloomy view of things – because we don't know the meaning of work. We're descended from people who despised it..."⁴¹ (ibid: 88). In their book *Rodnaya Rech* (1995) Petr Vayl and Alexandr Genis point out that for Chekhov's characters freedom is a burden everyone wishes to get rid of. Everyone wants to turn from a free and therefore needless person into someone: a telegrapher, a teacher, a bank clerk, a wife – or at least a horse: "...better be an ox or just a horse as long as you can work"⁴², – says Irina (Chekhov 1976: 76). Vayl and Genis argue: "Chekhovian characters run about the scene in search of a role. They long to get rid of their inutility, the painful freedom of being nobody and the need to simply live, not to build a life"⁴³ (Genis, Vayl 1995: 184). This search of a role is an existential search of one's placement in the world.

Later in the play Irina's wish seems to finally come true: she starts to work. And it does not take long before she admits she is terribly tired and unhappy with her job in the telegraph service: "I must find another job because this one doesn't suit me. The things I'd hoped for and wanted so much – they're just what it doesn't give me. It's sheer drudgery with nothing romantic or intellectual about it..."⁴⁴ (ibid: 97). The key words here are "nothing romantic or intellectual" – in another translation "soulless, mindless work". Indeed, Irina starts to realize that not *any* kind of work can bring satisfaction and a feeling of fulfillment, but a meaningful and enjoyable one. Reality proves sobering.

After a while Irina finds another job, but unfortunately that does not change much. She becomes even more desperate and hopeless:

IRINA [*trying to control herself*]. Oh, I'm so miserable. I can't, I won't, I will not work. I've had enough. I used to be at the post office and now I work for the town

council, and I loathe and despise everything they give me to do. I'm twenty-three, I've been working all this time and my brain's shriveled up. I've grown thin and ugly and old and I've nothing to show for it, nothing, no satisfaction of any kind, while time passes by and I feel I'm losing touch with everything fine and genuine in life. It's like sinking down, down into a bottomless pit. I'm desperate. Why am I still alive, why haven't I done away with myself? I don't know...⁴⁵ (ibid: 119).

Feeling empty and willing to die, Irina is on the verge of absolute despair. Now she would probably prefer idle boredom to labour boredom, but it is obvious that neither of options is promising. Needless to say that until she finds her calling, some field where she could realize herself in, she will continue to suffer.

However, one may wonder if that is possible at all. Isn't this longing for a perfect job just a great illusion? The same romantic craving for something you are unlikely to ever get? Something "out there", "fine and genuine" life? It seems like Irina and her sisters simply can never be satisfied with what they have and are unable to appreciate what life offers them.

I mentioned above that existential boredom often implies expectation of something indefinite to come. At first sight it seems like Irina longs for very specific and clear things – job, moving to Moscow. But in fact she dreams of something that does not exist – work as an everyday feast and the city of her childhood memories. She refuses to understand that even in the most creative jobs there is a great deal of routine and unpleasant tasks. Perhaps no matter what job she gets, she will never be quite content. Perhaps moving to Moscow would not solve any of sisters' problems either. Romantic longing for something they cannot have, chasing for illusions and "better life" will always make them unhappy and bored.

Unlike the three sisters, Elena Andreevna in *Uncle Vanya* does not even have any illusions or dreams. She is also unsatisfied with her life, but absolutely does not know what to do with it. More than anyone in that play she complains about her never-ending boredom. Astrov being in love with her nevertheless reproaches her for that dullness, though very cautiously and behind her back:

ASTROV. She is beautiful, there's no question about that, but – let's face it, she does nothing but eat, sleep, go for walks and enchant us with her beauty. That's all. She has no responsibilities, and other people work for her. That's so, isn't it? But there's something wrong about a life of idleness⁴⁶ (ibid: 38).

Here for the first – if not the only – time in Chekhov’s plays idle life is labeled “нечистая” (impure) and therefore sinful. That corresponds with the concept *acedia* which, as I already mentioned, was regarded as the most grievous sin in medieval theology because it originated all other sins.

Moral judgment is though something that Astrov – as much as Chekhov himself – finds inappropriate. Having expressed his reproach, Astrov immediately bethinks: “Well, perhaps I’m a bit harsh”⁴⁷ (ibid: 38).

Astrov, Sonya and Uncle Vanya are the characters who work hard and hence are opposed to idle Elena. This opposition comes out clearly in the conversation between Sonya and Elena in the Act III:

ELENA ANDREEVNA. [*miserably*]. I’m bored to death, I don’t know what to do.

SONYA [*shrugging her shoulders*]. There’s plenty to do if you wanted to.

ELENA ANDREEVNA. Well, for example?

SONYA. You could help to run the farm. You could do some teaching or nursing, there’s plenty to do. For instance, before you and Father lived here Uncle Vanya and I used to go to market and sell our own flour.

ELENA ANDREEVNA. I’m no good at that sort of thing, and besides I’m not interested. It’s only in a certain kind of earnest novel that people go in for teaching and dosing peasants. And do you really see me suddenly dropping everything to run round nursing and teaching?

SONYA. What I don’t understand is how you can help wanting to go and teach. You’d get used to it after a bit. [*Embraces her.*] Don’t be bored, dear⁴⁸ (ibid: 44).

It is clear that Elena Andreevna and Sonya are unable to understand each other. All Sonya’s suggestions meet resistance and come to nothing after Elena’s confession “I’m no good at that” and an even more unbeatable point “I’m not interested”. Elena feels she cannot make sincere efforts to work for others, to be helpful and self-giving. Suffering from boredom, she does not even try to fight it. Sonya’s encouragement “don’t be bored” might sound naive and even odd, but I believe it simply implies: do something.

This conversation is another proof that social issues are not very relevant when it comes to existential boredom. In any social status, even in the idle upper-class, it is possible to find a sphere where one can be of help. After all, women can always turn to their eternal vocation – motherhood. Yet, all the bored women discussed here – the

three sisters, Elena, Hedda, Bolette are childless and have no plans of having children. Hedda flinches and gets angry at every little hint about a baby:

BRACK. But then when you're faced with... what I may... perhaps a little pompously... refer to as a sacred and... and exacting responsibility? [*Smiles.*] A new responsibility, my little lady.

HEDDA [*angry*]. Be quiet! You'll never see anything of that sort!

BRACK [*carefully*]. We'll talk about it in a year's time... at the very latest.

HEDDA [*shortly*]. I've no aptitude for any such thing, Mr Brack. No responsibilities for me, thank you!

BRACK. Why shouldn't you, like most other women, have a natural aptitude for a vocation that...?

HEDDA [*at the glass door*]. Oh, be quiet, I say!... (Ibsen 1966: 213).

Raising a child – as Hedda notes – implies responsibility for someone else's life, and this is absolutely undesirable as long as she cannot figure out what to do with her own life. This is also true for Elena.

Both Sonya and Astrov point out that Elena's boredom and idleness are contagious. All the other characters get more and more affected by this "infection". Sonya says to Elena with a gentle reproach:

SONYA. You're bored, you don't know what to do with yourself and boredom and idleness are infectious. Look – Uncle Vanya does nothing but trail round after you like a shadow. I've left my work and rushed along here to talk to you. And I've grown so impossibly lazy⁴⁹ (Chekhov 1976: 44-45).

Indeed, the arrival of Serebryakov and his wife brought dissonance to the ordered quiet life of the estate where everybody had some work to do. Dullness starts covering everything and everyone.

Astrov is more direct and offensive in his judgments:

ASTROV. You two have infected us all with your idleness. I've been under your spell and I've done nothing for a whole month while all the time people have been falling ill and the villagers have been grazing their cattle in my newly-planted woods. So you see, you and your husband bring havoc wherever you go...⁵⁰ (ibid: 63).

Idleness is killing, but what is more important: it is destructive not only for idlers, but also for people around them.

When the Serebryakovs decide to leave by the end of the play, all characters feel a great relief. Sonya and Voynitsky go back to routine work. Although Uncle Vanya has to do things that go against the grain and for the benefit of a person he despises, he is glad to get absorbed in work. Work saves him not only from boredom and idleness, but also from excessive reflection, despair, unanswered love and other miseries. Sonya is also fully aware of the unfailing effect of this “medicine” and finds solace and peace of mind in work. “We shall work for others” (ibid: 67), – she says, and her self-devotion to others is what constitutes the *meaning*.

Perhaps the sisters’ failure to find a meaning in their job is rooted in their everlasting romantic aspirations. Svendsen argues that work does not save romantics from boredom, but rather serves as a source of it. Romantics rebel against “the monotony of the bourgeois work and its work ethic” (Svendsen 2005: 139). As an eloquent evidence of it Svendsen discusses Friedrich Schlegel’s novel *Lucinde* (1799). In the chapter “The Idyll of Leisure” Schlegel praises idleness because “all the empty, restless activity does not produce anything else than boredom – other people’s and one’s own” (Schlegel 1994: 56). The ideal of leisure is considered to be an alternative to the mechanized, routinized life of the modern society.

Thus, no work is meaningful in itself. It is an individual who attaches value to this or that activity. Tesman is doing absurd researches in Hedda’s eyes, but he is fully content with what he is doing and is never bored. Irina deals with more practical things at the post office, Olga has an important teaching job, but work does not make any sense for them.

Svendsen did not mention in his research a very important issue – the issue of a personal choice. If one is doomed to idleness or certain kind of work, one will feel tedium and despair very soon, because this way of life goes against one’s nature and therefore one cannot achieve self-actualization. Alternatively, if one is free to choose any activity one likes, one has more chances not to end up drowning in boredom. Existential boredom thus always comes from *restricted self-realization*.

Tesman, Thea, Kulygin, Sonya, Astrov (with minor reservations) are free in their choice: they enjoy working and actualize their existence through work. Uncle Vanya, Olga, Irina, Andrey are not satisfied with their job and feel limited by circumstances. Olga regards her duties as an incubus, something she would love to get rid of once and forever. Irina, Andrey and Uncle Vanya simply want to do something

else, feeling that their dead-end work does not fit them and they could do so much more. Masha, Chebutykin seem to be fully satisfied with idleness and have no further ambitions.

The cases of Elena Andreevna and Hedda Gabler are perhaps the most complicated ones. Both women seem to be the most miserable and unsatisfied of all. For some reason they cannot truly enjoy their leisure, and at the same time they clearly claim that they do not want to work. It is peculiar that Hedda who looks so much more active and energetic than the three sisters is in fact as inert as them (if not more) – she avoids any actions to change her destiny. “She admires the will to action, but she cannot act herself”, – fairly enough points out Errol Durbach (Durbach 1982: 43). Hedda admits that she has no other vocation in life but “boring herself to death”. In such a state – lack of any desires – one has hardly any chances to ever get over profound boredom.

In *Hedda Gabler* there is one more protagonist who should be considered in the discussion of existential boredom – Lovborg. Throughout the play he never complains about boredom or the lack of meaning in life. He has both a close person he can trust and a successful career. But from the conversations we get to know that he has been suffering from a serious existential crisis for years. He was wasting his life in debauches and boozes, constantly chasing after strong stimuli. “Where there is a lack of personal meaning, all sorts of diversions have to create a substitute – an ersatz-meaning, – argues Svendsen in his book. – ...The pell-mell rush for diversions precisely indicates our fear of the emptiness that surrounds us. This rush, the demand for satisfaction and the lack of satisfaction are inextricably intertwined” (Svendsen 2005: 26-27). This life of dissipation allowed him to forget himself, distracted his attention from self-reflection and search for meaning. But chasing pleasure brought nothing but further devastation.

Kant argues that vacuum experienced by a bored person can never be filled with diversions:

The pleasures of life do not fill time, but leave it empty. ...Present time can admittedly seem to us to be full, but in our memory it nevertheless appears to be empty, for when time is filled with diversions and the like, it only feels full while it is contemporaneous – in the memory it is empty (Kant 1902: 234).

In idleness we feel “lack of life” (Kant 1990: 175), we perceive our life as meaningless and passing by in vain. According to Kant, the only medicine against this feeling is of course work: “Man is the only animal who has to work” (Kant 1902: 471). Otherwise one would become aware of the life absurdity.

In the play Lovborg appears “newborn” – he seems to have become “quite a sober citizen again” (Ibsen 1966: 198) and left behind his dissolute life. For a while, under Thea’s influence and care, his energy was directed to creative work. He is writing books and trying to “start over”. Nevertheless, Hedda did not need too much time to provoke him to return to his old way of life. The power of self-destruction proved to be stronger than he had hoped. Further going to the bottom is caused by the loss of Hedda’s affection and his work. All his life was concentrated in the manuscript – a great work done and a hope for the future career. It is remarkable that the book itself deals with the future. Losing it symbolizes not having future anymore:

MRS. ELVSTED [*wrings her hands*]. Oh God... oh God, Hedda... torn his work to pieces!

LOVBORG. I’ve torn my own life to pieces. So I might as well tear up my life’s work as well (ibid: 247).

What is a book compared to the whole life torn to pieces? And yet, with the loss of this work Lovborg gives up the last drop of hope and the very point of life. Nothing stops him from giving up the life itself anymore. And although his death reminds an accident, Lovborg was definitely seeking death.

Thea is one of those few characters who confessed she felt completely happy at some point. She refers to the time when she helped Lovborg with his work and thus had both intimacy with a person she loved and a meaningful occupation: “And then came that beautiful, happy time, when I shared his work!” (ibid: 194).

When Thea loses Lovborg’s affection and the possibility to help him with his work, she becomes truly desperate:

MRS. ELVSTED [*yielding to despair*]. What am I to do with my life, then? (ibid: 246).

Having no-one and nothing to devote her life to, she has no reason to live. Only when Thea retrieves her helping mission, she feels satisfied. It may perhaps seem weird that Thea finds compensation so fast. But the “horror vacui” is there and needs to be filled

as soon as possible. It is indeed wise of Thea and Tesman not to focus on losses (“there’s no point in crying over split milk” (ibid: 261), – they agree), but instead to take the reality as it is, make the best out of it and go on. “I’ll devote my whole life to this work!” (ibid: 261) – says Tesman, and we can be sure that existential boredom will never strike him.

To conclude, I share the opinion of Svendsen that the question about boredom origin is “not a question of idleness but of meaning” (Svendsen 2005: 34). No matter how much work or free time one has, one can be bored to death. When a person fails to see a meaning in what he is doing, he or she feels lost and frustrated. Like Irina and Olga, one will soon experience alienation from work and feel burned-out. Tatyana Shakh-Azizova argues that in the “new drama” ...“the characters don’t succeed in anything – no matter if it’s small or big things. Their faith is ruined, wishes don’t come true, and endeavors fail. They are not satisfied with what they manage to achieve; and neither love, nor work brings relief”⁵¹ (Shakh-Azizova 1966: 30). I disagree with this statement because work becomes a true existential salvation for certain characters. The three sisters, Sonya and Uncle Vanya eventually manage to find satisfaction even in what first seemed like a hard and meaningless job. *Serving others* becomes their “mission” and release from melancholy.

5. Boredom and love

As mentioned above, love is another value that can fill one’s life and keep an individual from existential boredom. Through connection to other people one might manage to reach self-realization. “Life is boring without a powerful love”, – claimed Chekhov in his letter to Suvorin⁵².

Hedda is one of those characters who definitely fail to establish intimate relationships with other people. In the second act, in her conversation with Judge Brack Hedda directly confesses that she was bored on her wedding journey: “Oh no, my dear Mr. Brack... for me it was horribly tedious!” (Ibsen 1966: 205). Bored on her honeymoon trip – what could be more strange and dreary?

Hedda stubbornly avoids even the very word “love”. First we got to know that she has no feelings for Tesman. To Brack’s assumption that a boring travel could be

still enjoyable if Hedda was in love with her husband, she reacts: “Ugh... don’t use this glutinous word!” (ibid: 206) – “det klissete ord!” (III, 403). Later in the play, when love is mentioned by Lovborg, she just smiles at his naivety:

LOVBORG. Ah, I see. Because of your love... for Jorgen Tesman.

HEDDA [*glances sideways at him and smiles*]. Love? That’s good!

LOVBORG. Not love then! (ibid: 221)

And finally, when we are almost ready to believe that her love is hidden in her past – in relationships with Lovborg – she clearly denies it too. Even to Lovborg’s direct provoking questions Hedda has cold and rational answers:

LOVBORG. Was there no love in your relationship to me either? Not a trace... not a suspicion of love in that either?

HEDDA. Can there have been, I wonder? My memory is that we were two good companions. Really sincere friends (ibid: 222).

Hedda admits though that she appreciated their friendship, or “companionship”, as she calls it: “When I think back to that time, wasn’t there something beautiful, something attractive... something courageous too, it seems to me... about this... this secret intimacy, this companionship that no one even dreamed of?” (ibid: 222). It is interesting to note that Hedda describes that relationship not from an emotional, but rather aesthetical perspective – “beautiful, attractive”. Did she put her heart and soul into this friendship at all? Was this a real closeness of two like-minded persons? Unlikely.

When Lovborg questions Hedda what it was that actually bound them years ago, they come to conclusion that it was their “common lust for life” (ibid: 223) – “kameratskap i livsbegj?rt” (III, 412). As they meet again, they apparently have a different thing in common – the lack of this lust for life. Nothing really interests them, they are suffering from not knowing what to do with their lives and both die. Even on the same day. A similar connection we can find between Elena and Voynitsky. They both feel bored and unsatisfied, and consider themselves boring. Elena says: “Do you know why you and I are such good friends, Vanya? It must be because we’re both such abysmal bores. Yes, bores!”⁵³ (Chekhov 1976: 29).

However, Voynitsky is in love and desperately wants Elena to love him back, whilst Hedda neither gives love nor seeks it. It seems like she is totally incapable of real

human intimacy and therefore doomed to loneliness. Perhaps the only person Hedda would be able to love is that who does not exist – Dionysus – her romantic “perfect version” of Lovborg. She makes several attempts to breathe life into this fake but never succeeds.

The marriage of Tesman and Hedda seems extremely weird, almost random. As Toril Moi figuratively puts it: “It is as if a comfortable old dog had married a tigress” (Moi 2006: 317). When Hedda tries to explain Lovborg her choice, all she can say is: “Yes... that’s the way of it” (Ibsen 1966: 220). Hedda describes the series of events prior to the wedding as if everything was happening of its own accord, beyond her control and will. Hedda, being such a strong and freedom-loving woman, was simply going with the flow back then and finally “found herself” married. When there is no love, no passion, no calling, does it make any difference, indeed? Similarly, Moi assumes that the choice of Tesman is due to Hedda’s romantic disillusionment – it “comes across as a moment of desperate acting out: when there are no heroes anymore, it doesn’t matter who one marries” (ibid: 317).

Masha in *Three Sisters* also “found herself married”. She says: “Меня выдали замуж, когда мне было восемнадцать лет” – that is most often translated as simply “I was married” while in fact this impression has a passive meaning – “I was married off”. In these words we hear the same intonation of having no control over events. It just happened. Like Hedda, she is unhappy in her marriage, gets more and more irritated at her boring pedantic husband – a Latin teacher – and finally cheats on him. Gordon McVay makes a fair point when commenting this: “Masha seems almost to be disclaiming responsibility for her poor choice of spouse. Yet, presumably she was not forced into marriage” (McVay 1995: 22-23). Indeed, neither Masha nor Hedda was forced to get married; nevertheless they conceive their marriage as a fatal burden. Antonija Gospodinova makes a good point when comparing Hedda and Masha:

...No-one forced Hedda to marry Jorgen Tesman. She has not even gone through the transformation from “it seemed” to “it turned out” (*kazalos’-okazalos’*) like Masha in *Three Sisters*. From the very beginning Hedda knew what kind of person he was and what life would be like in this marriage⁵⁴ (Gospodinova 1999: 142).

Both with her husband and other people around her Hedda remains cold and wicked. Her emotional deafness reminds of self-defense at times. Perhaps, Hedda knows very well that as soon as one gets emotionally involved in a relationship, one

becomes highly vulnerable. Afraid of getting hurt, she prefers to hurt. And thus stays lonely.

Loneliness creates and deepens existential boredom. Hedda plays on other people's heartstrings, but fails to find an intimate like-minded friend she could trust and share boring hours with. She obviously considers herself exceptional looking down on everybody else and thus feels extremely lonely in her social environment. She does not try to understand anybody and in return suffers from lack of understanding too. Sometimes her dialogue with another character sounds like an aside – something she is saying to herself because she is convinced that others will not be able to understand her anyway:

TESMAN. And you can't imagine, Hedda, how overjoyed Aunt Julle was in spite of everything... because you looked so well from the trip!

HEDDA [*half under her breath, getting up*]. Oh, these everlasting aunts!

TESMAN. Eh?

HEDDA [*crossing the glass door*]. Nothing.

TESMAN. Oh, all right then (Ibsen 1966: 210).

In this conversation people apparently do not listen to each other, do not even care what the other is saying.

The same disconnection between people can be found in Chekhov's plays:

No-one understands anyone, the world has fallen to pieces, the relations are empty, and an individual is enclosed in a glass shell of loneliness. A Chekhovian dialogue often turns into alternating monologues, a set of addressless remarks⁵⁵ (Genis, Vayl 1995: 184).

For instance, Andrey's most emotional and bitter words are told when he is alone or in the present of his deaf servant Ferapont:

ANDREY. Isn't it funny, my dear old fellow, how things change? And isn't life a swindle?

(...)

FERAPONT. I don't know, sir, I'm a bit hard of hearing.

ANDREY. If you could hear properly I don't suppose I'd talk to you at all. I must to talk to someone, but my wife doesn't understand me and I'm somehow afraid of my

sisters, afraid they'll laugh at me and make me look a complete fool⁵⁶ (Chekhov 1976: 94).

Disconnection between people is so great that husbands do not notice (or do not want to notice) they are unloved. Jorgen Tesman, for instance, is naively convinced that Hedda's speculation with Lovborg's manuscript was made for his sake:

TESMAN. No, of course, nobody must get to know about that. But your burning zeal on my behalf, Hedda... Auntie Julle really must hear about that! (Ibsen 1966: 256).

The same reluctance to see the obvious is evident in Kulygin, Masha's husband:

KULYGIN [*puts his arm round Masha's waist, laughing*]. Masha loves me. My wife loves me (Chekhov 1976: 86).

Remaining in illusion of a happy marriage, Kulygin looks content throughout the play. "I'm happy, happy, oh so happy!" – he repeats. "I'm bored, bored, oh so bored" (ibid: 118), – replies Masha. That could easily be Hedda's motto too.

At the most dramatic moment – when everybody is astir with the bad news of Lovborg's death – it becomes clear how huge and impassable the gulf between Hedda and others is:

HEDDA [*triumphantly*]. At last... a really courageous act!

TESMAN [*alarmed*]. But good Lord... what are you saying, Hedda?

HEDDA. I say that there is beauty in this deed.

BRACK. Hm, Mrs. Tesman...

TESMAN. Beauty! Think of that!

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, Hedda, how can you call a thing like that beautiful? (Ibsen 1966: 260)

Tesman, Brack, Thea – everybody is shocked by Hedda's comment and unable to comprehend the underlying meaning of her words. And Hedda does not bother to explain what she means being aware she won't be supported. She is simply doomed to stand alone.

However, at times she openly expresses her wish to have a close person to talk to. Hedda confesses she missed such a person during her wedding journey when the

hardest thing was “everlastingly having to be together with... the self-same person” (ibid: 205). Hedda hints: the one she needs could be Brack, though it is obvious that he is not her soul mate and that the only person who might be truly close to her is Lovborg. However, Hedda feels they are drifting apart throughout the play and for some reason she is pushing him away even more. Eventually she loses Lovborg with his death, thus gets trapped in complete loneliness.

Loneliness can be creative, fruitful and bring an opportunity for self-actualization if a person is self-sufficient and his inner life is full. On the other hand, loneliness could be destructive and devastating:

The crucial thing is how it [loneliness] is encountered, whether it is encountered as a restless absence or as a possibility for serenity. ...In loneliness there is a possibility of being in equilibrium with oneself rather than seeking equilibrium in things and people that have such a high velocity that they constantly slip away (Svendsen 2005: 145).

Apparently Hedda lacks this kind of spiritual balance that could allow her to enjoy her solitude. She seems to have no inner forces and self-control to cope with her own exceptionality.

Right before committing a suicide, when Tesman and Thea set to work on Lovborg's notes, Hedda feels more bored and lonelier than ever. Being aware she cannot take part in that work, she still asks: “And is there nothing I can do to help you two?” – and is not surprised at the reply: “No, not at all” (Ibsen 1966: 267). Thus, she lacks not only her own vocation, but also an ability to help other people in their work. It turns out Hedda is not even good enough to play a supporting role. Now she loses even her unloved husband. Suddenly Hedda realizes that her boredom will just grow and become unbearable. She feels totally lost and abandoned. One of her last lines is: “And how am I supposed to survive the evenings out here?” (ibid: 268).

Tatyana Shakh-Azizova regards loneliness as one of the dominating motives in the “new drama”:

It is lonely people who become protagonists of the “new drama”... It is namely not physical, but spiritual loneliness: an individual is living in a crowded world, involved in social activities, but spiritually not attached to anything⁵⁷ (Shakh-Azizova 1966: 31-32).

As Andrey Prozorov puts it: “Now here you know everybody and everybody knows you, but you don’t seem to belong at all. You’re the odd man out all right”⁵⁸ (Chekhov 1976: 94).

In *Three Sisters* the characters indeed suffer from loneliness and misunderstanding, but unlike Hedda they do long for love and regard it as a crucial existential value. Though in Olga’s case it is rather substituted by the value of marriage. Just like Olga’s complaints about hard work are not taken as a warning by the non-working sisters, Masha’s deep dissatisfaction with the marriage life is not taken as a caution signal by others. Olga’s only dream is to be married – no matter to whom: “...I’d marry without love. I’d marry the first man who came along provided it was someone honest and decent. I’d even marry an old man”⁵⁹ (ibid: 119). In another conversation she says: “I’d love my husband”⁶⁰ (ibid: 74). These weird remarks are worth paying attention. Olga seeks not a person to love, but a *husband* to love. And that could be anyone. Her longing for love is strong, but longing for marriage is much stronger.

In contrast, Irina yearns for “real love” and firmly repels men’s advances. They are in discord with her ideal of romantic love. Unfortunately, despite of her thirst for love, she feels empty – she is not able to love yet:

IRINA [*Cries*]. I’ve never been in love, never. Oh, I’ve longed for love, dreamed about it so much day and night, but my heart is like a wonderful grand piano that can’t be used because it’s locked up and the key’s lost⁶¹ (ibid: 132).

All her expectations about love were related to Moscow:

IRINA. I’ve been waiting for us to move to Moscow all this time, thinking I’d meet my true love there. I’ve dreamed about him, loved him, but that was sheer foolishness as it’s turned out⁶² (ibid: 120).

She already *loved* him. Whom? A fake, a dream. This constant romantic faith in a place where all the dreams come true leads to a great frustration. As soon as Irina realizes her dream was just a dream, she accepts Tuzenbakh’s proposal.

Andrey is the only one in the family who during the play manages to both fall in love and marry a woman he loves. But after a while his passion fades away, he starts to notice Natasha’s vulgarity – something his sisters always pointed at – and ends up completely disappointed in his marriage. He gives a friendly advice to Chebutykin:

“One shouldn’t get married, indeed one shouldn’t. It’s a bore”⁶³ (ibid: 106). Unmarried Chebutykin raises an objection that might seem fair: “Yes, yes, that’s a point of view, but there is such a thing as loneliness. You can argue about it as much as you like, my boy, but loneliness is a terrible thing”⁶⁴ (ibid: 160).

Andrey does not reply to this, but what he might have said echoes Chekhov’s own words from one of his notebooks: “If you fear loneliness, then don’t get married”⁶⁵ (Chekhov: XVII, 85). Boredom creeps in the marriage. Two persons in a couple feel deeply lonely and isolated – perhaps exactly because they are not supposed to be.

After having expressed his bitter complaint about loneliness Chebutykin further adds his favorite refrain: “Though actually of course it doesn’t matter a damn”⁶⁶ (Chekhov 1976: 160). Indeed, it seems like it doesn’t matter whether one is married or not, one feels extremely lonely all the same.

In *Uncle Vanya* the protagonists long for love with all their heart and never find it. Their feelings are never returned and they feel deeply unhappy:

VOYNITSKY. My life and my love – well, there you have it. What can I do with them? What can I make of them? My feelings are wasted like a ray of sunlight falling in a well, and I’m running to waste too⁶⁷ (ibid: 34).

From the very first act Doctor Astrov appears to go through an existential crisis. He sadly confesses that he has no wishes anymore and feels no attachment to anything or anyone: “...Somehow I don’t feel things keenly anymore. I don’t want anything, I don’t seem to need anything and there’s no one I’m fond of”⁶⁸ (ibid: 20).

Later in the play he repeats that complaint again: “I don’t expect anything for myself anymore and I don’t care for other people either. It’s ages since I was really fond of anyone”⁶⁹ (ibid: 39). Despite the meaningful job – a doctor – and an interesting hobby (he cares for forests and ecology in general), Astrov feels a great dissatisfaction, even some kind of apathy. He drinks a lot and tries to convince himself that love is not needed. Nevertheless he admits that attraction to a woman could bring him to life:

ASTROV. There’s no one I love, or ever shall love now. One thing still thrills me – beauty. That does affect me very much. I think if Helen Serebryakov wanted to for instance, she could turn my head in a day. But then that wouldn’t be love or affection [Covers his eyes with his hand and shudders.]⁷⁰ (ibid: 40).

In a deep boredom when nothing in life seems worthwhile, passion appears to be a straw to catch. But then again, Astrov is aware that it would not be a deep feeling – “love or affection” – based on a true closeness, but rather a way to forget all the worries for a while. Just like in Lovborg’s case, passion is not a salvation for Astrov, but a little relief that further turns into some kind of agony.

In the third act Astrov finally reveals his feelings for Elena. It might look surprising – if we recall Astrov’s blaming words about her: she does nothing, but eat and sleep – that kind of idleness is sick. But he is not seeking a soul mate – as mentioned above, his feeling is nothing but an aesthetic admiration.

In contrast, Elena admires Astrov’s personality and for a moment it seems like their affair is about to happen. Reflecting about Sonya’s crush she says:

ELENA. I understand the poor child so well. In the middle of this ghastly boredom, where there are no real people, but just dim, grey shapes drifting round, where you hear nothing but vulgar trivialities, where no one does anything but eat, drink and sleep – *he* appears from time to time, so different from the others, so handsome, charming and fascinating, like a bright moon rising in the darkness. To fall under the spell of such a man, to forget everything... I do believe I’m a little attracted myself. Yes, I’m bored when he’s not about and here I am smiling as I think of him⁷¹ (ibid: 47).

It is quite ironical that Elena is discussing other people in the same words and blaming them for the same things that she was blamed for by Astrov. Elena sees only boredom and vulgarity around her, but she is a part of this boring world – boredom and total passivity have crept into her soul too. However, falling in love means losing peace of mind to her. She does her best to escape emotional mess. One never knows what it brings, while cold calmness is comfortable and safe. After all, love requires emotional work, and she is apparently too lazy and bored to manage it. Astrov is nevertheless certain that love is the only thing that could fill Elena’s existential emptiness. When she decides to leave the village and run away from troubles, he begs:

ASTROV. Do stay, please. You have nothing in the world to do, you may as well admit it – no object in life, nothing to occupy your mind – and sooner or later your feelings are going to be too much for you, that’s bound to happen. Well, it would be a lot better for it to happen here in the depths of the country than in Kharkov or Kursk or somewhere like that. At least this is a romantic sort of place and it’s even beautiful in autumn⁷² (ibid: 62).

But it does not sound convincing enough to Elena; she needs neither Voynitsky's nor Astrov's love and tries to flee from temptation. So she remains with her vacuum and boredom – with nothing she burns for and no one she is attracted to. Every time she is ready to “fall under the spell”, fall to temptation, she gets scared and suppresses her feelings. Only once Elena expresses her wish to do that:

ELENA. And Uncle Vanya says I've mermaid's blood in my veins. 'Let yourself go for once in your life'. Well, and why not? Perhaps that would be the thing. Oh to fly away, free as a bird, away from you all, away from your sleepy faces and your talk, to forget that you so much as exist! But I'm such a coward, I'm so shy. My conscience would torment me⁷³ (ibid: 47).

Here is all the comprehensive explanation – nothing to add. She has her reasons implied in her nature on one hand (coward, shy) and some moral values (conscience) on another hand. It is also worth to note that Elena wishes not to come along with one man or another, she simply wants to run away from everybody – ‘nowhere’ – some mysterious place where she could avoid seeing “sleepy faces” including perhaps her own sleepy face in the mirror.

This romantic craving remains just a momentary impulse in Elena's case. In contrast, Ellida – “the lady from the sea” – is the one who is permanently overwhelmed by romantic dreams about other places and other people. Ellida never complains about boredom, but we can see some signs of existential crisis – her never-ending melancholy, dissatisfaction with the reality and mixture of contradictory feelings where the dominating one is that of missing someone without whom her life would not be complete.

In line with Irina who already loves a man she only hopes to meet and Hedda who saves her love for Dionysus, Ellida is in love with a romantic phantom even though it is a real human being. Errol Durbach points out: “The ‘halfness’ of the mermaid's divided nature is located not only in the sea-land dichotomy, but in the tension between romanticism and reality” (Durbach 1982: 158). Her ordinary land marriage cannot satisfy her because it is imperfect by definition. She craves for more, but in fact even a union with her “idol” would hardly make her happy. The source of her dissatisfaction will be still there – concealed in her own imagination. She is

confronted not by the Stranger's call, but by her own contradictory impulses. She tries to explain it to Wangel:

ELLIDA. What is there to protect me against? There is no external power or force threatening me. This thing is much more deeply seated, Wangel! The pull is within my own mind. And what can you do about that? (Ibsen 1966: 102).

Like Durbach, I believe that "her needs are far beyond what any mortal man can guarantee" (Durbach 1982: 161) and her "desperate search for love finally becomes a self-destructive quest" (ibid: 171). Indeed, Ellida's romantic aspirations remain destructive and harmful for her until she learns to accept and even relish the reality. She reconsiders her marriage life, but it is open to question if she truly puts her heart in that decision. Irina by the end of the play also seems to get rid of her illusions and accepts the proposal from a man she has no feelings for. However, this "deal" with the reality makes her deeply unhappy and perhaps she feels even a bit of relief when Tuzenbakh shortly after that gets killed.

No-one in the plays discussed here finds solace in love. All love stories are tragic, all feelings are wasted. However, it is unlikely that even mutual love alone will be sufficient to bring existential fullness. I share Svendsen's doubts about that:

It is difficult to see all-consuming love as a credible answer to the problem of boredom, for true love will never be able to bear a whole life on its own. Love may seem to be enough when one does not possess it, but when one has, it will always be insufficient (Svendsen 2005: 140).

6. Boredom, time and place

I started my analysis of boredom with the assumption that it is closely related to romanticism, i.e. always implies dissatisfaction with the reality. I believe the craving for something that is missing often refers to a different time or a different place (sometimes both).

“Boredom contains a need or longing for a different time”, – claims Svendsen (Svendsen 2005: 130-131). The Russian writer Marina Moskvina expresses this idea in a more general way telling that this longing is typical for everybody: “People are fully lost either in memories or in dreams” (Moskvina 2008: 44). It proves true when we look at Chekhov’s characters. References to the time (the words “years”, “time”, “future”, “past” etc.) are countless in *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*. Gordon McVay gives a neat description of the sisters’ yearning for another time: “Discontented with their present life, the Prozorov children look to a golden past in Moscow, which they seek to translate into a golden future” (McVay 1995: 47). Indeed, feeling bored and unhappy, the Prozorovs constantly turn to the past in their thoughts – to the time when their father was alive and they all lived in Moscow – or to the future when they hope to reanimate their past:

OLGA. It’s warm today and we can have the windows wide open, but the birch trees aren’t in leaf yet. It’s eleven years now since Father got his brigade and we all left Moscow. I remember it so well. It was early May, as it is now, and in Moscow everything was in blossom, it was warm and there was sunshine everywhere. Eleven years ago, but I remember it all as though we’d only left yesterday⁷⁴ (Chekhov 1976: 73).

The past is remembered so vividly that it continues to live in the present. Richard Gilman calls this romantic nostalgia “feeling frozen in time” (Gilman 1987). Masha gets nostalgic on Irina’s birthday:

MASHA. In the old days when Father was alive there’d be thirty or forty officers at our parties and it was all great fun, but today there’s only one man and a boy and the place is like a graveyard. I must go – I’m down in the dumps today, I feel so depressed, so don’t you listen to me⁷⁵ (ibid: 77).

One might wonder what is so tragic about not having a big party. After all, the closest persons are all there and they need each other’s support and care. However, instead of giving it, Masha prefers to go away crying and casting gloom over others. Birthday is, odd enough, associated with death – graveyard. Memories sneak and spoil today’s happy event. “My unhappiness at the present is that I am jealous of the past”, – said Kierkegaard in his diaries (Kierkegaard 1992: 224). Apparently the sisters are familiar with that feeling.

Andrey is the one who is least fixated on the family's past in Moscow. He is concerned about more general human decline and his own degradation:

ANDREY. Where is my past life, oh what has become of it – when I was young, happy and intelligent, when I had such glorious thoughts and visions, and my present and future seemed so bright and promising? Why is it we've hardly started living before we all become dull, drab, boring, lazy, complacent, useless and miserable?⁷⁶ (ibid: 133)

He starts with himself, but then draws a very universal conclusion about all people fatally getting bored and boring with the time. Andrey finds no answers.

Future is another thing Chekhov's characters discuss all the time. Some of them, like Vershinin and Astrov, are obsessed with very remote future – the time of other generations:

ASTROV. ...if man is happy a thousand years from now I'll have done a bit towards it myself⁷⁷ (ibid: 28).

VERSHININ. In two or three hundred years life on this earth will be beautiful beyond our dreams, it will be marvelous. Man needs a life like that, and if he hasn't yet got it he must feel he's going to get it, he must look forward to it, dream about it, prepare for it⁷⁸ (ibid: 84).

Vershinin, amazingly enough, does not suffer from existential boredom. A naive and idyllic faith in a coming "heaven on earth" gives him strength to cope with his everyday problems.

The three sisters at the beginning of the play are focused on a closer future. At first sight it seems like they have more or less realistic ideas and are not lost in illusions and utopias. They are making plans about moving to Moscow, and their dreams about it are mixed with happy childhood memories. As time goes on, nothing happens. The Soviet critic Anatoly Lunacharsky gave a very expressive comment on the sister's apathy: "Would you believe it, they want to go to Moscow! Heavens above, go to Moscow then, who on earth is stopping you?.." (Lunacharsky 1903: 59-60). They delay and delay, and we cannot understand what exactly keeps them from realizing their plan. "The non-departure for Moscow is perhaps the main non-event of the play", – argues Gordon McVay (McVay 1995: 44). This tragedy of "an unbought ticket" makes the sisters bored, frustrated and unsatisfied with the present. They keep cheating

themselves with the belief that as soon as they get to the place they were happy once, everything will be just perfect. Vershinin makes a cautious remark that Moscow is unlikely to bring them happiness in such a magic way: "...you won't notice Moscow when you live there. We have no happiness. There's no such thing. It's only something we long for"⁷⁹ (Chekhov 1976: 102).

However, the sisters turn a deaf ear to this comment and continue to build vain hopes. In their boredom time goes slowly and perceived in a deformed way. Thus, Irina feels old at the age of 23, and it seems to her that she has been working for ages while in fact it's been not more than three years:

IRINA. I'm twenty-three, I've been working all this time and my brain's shriveled up. I've grown thin and ugly and old and I've nothing to show for it, nothing, no satisfaction of any kind, while time passes by and I feel I'm losing touch with everything fine and genuine in life. It's like sinking down, down into a bottomless pit. I'm desperate⁸⁰ (ibid: 119).

The same feeling of "life passing by" we could see in Andrey ("where is my past life, oh what has become of it?"), and it is even more evident in Uncle Vanya:

VOYNITSKY. If you only knew! I can't sleep at night for frustration and anger at the stupid way I've wasted time when I might have had everything I can't have now because I'm too old⁸¹ (ibid: 25).

Sonya shows no sympathy: "Uncle Vanya, this is boring!"⁸² (ibid). Indeed, life is boring, but complaining about life might sound even more boring. The tragic thing about it is that close people do not hear each other.

Those three Chekhov's characters – Irina, Uncle Vanya and Andrey – are at different ages, but none of them is truly old. Still they regret about the past as if they were about to die and had to sum up their whole life. The time spent with no moving towards fulfillment is considered totally wasted, and thinking of it makes them panic. Having their whole life before them (especially Irina, the youngest one), they somehow do not feel that something can ever be changed.

Young Irina has a lot in common with Ibsen's Bolette. In a little provincial town the feeling of wasting time pursues Bolette. After having accepted Arnholm's proposal, she reveals what her anxiety is really about: "So I'm really going to have a chance to live. I had begun to fear that life was passing me by" (Ibsen 1966: 111). Life does not

seem to be lived, it is some kind of a “draft” while a real life has not even started, and it is delayed to some happier moment with better conditions. Even though it might be an illusion, it gives Bolette positive energy and strength to live on.

In contrast, the Chekhov’s characters (such as Voynitsky and Andrey) instead of taking any action and “go another way” seem stuck and put all their energy into regrets. Uncle Vanya complains:

VOYNITSKY. Soon the rain will be over. All living things will revive and breath more freely. Except me. The storm won’t revive me. Day and night my thoughts choke me, haunt me with the spectre of a life hopelessly wasted. I’ve never lived. My past life has been thrown away on stupid trivialities and the present is so futile, it appals me. My life and my love – well, there you have it. What can I do with them? What can I make of them?⁸³ (Chekhov 1976: 34).

Here is his sad conclusion: life is wasted and he cannot revive for a new one.

The time perception of those who suffer from existential crisis is highly contradictory. In boredom the present time seems to flow intolerably slow. As Joseph Brodsky puts it, boredom “represents pure, undiluted time in all its redundant, monotonous splendour” (Brodsky 1995: 109). However, when one looks back years appear to have gone in a flash: “My life has just flashed past like lightning”⁸⁴ (Chekhov 1976: 106), – says Chebutykin. All the past life seems empty (“I’ve never lived”) because it was not filled with existentially important events. V. Y. Linkov notes that in many stories and plays Chekhov wrote about “fleetness of time”: “Faced with time, one is helpless if he doesn’t know the meaning of his existence”⁸⁵ (Linkov 1995: 7).

It is quite paradoxical, but yet true, that only when the sisters and Andrey switch focus to the distant future, they seem to find strength to overcome dissatisfaction with the real life in the present:

IRINA [*puts her head on Olga’s breast*]. What is all this for? Why all this suffering? The answer will be known one day, and then there will be no more mysteries left, but till then life must go on, we must work and work and think of nothing else⁸⁶ (Chekhov 1976: 138-139).

OLGA. ... our sufferings will bring happiness to those who come after us, peace and joy will reign on earth...⁸⁷ (ibid: 139).

ANDREY. I loathe our present life, but thinking about the future makes me feel really good. I feel so easy and relaxed, I see a light glimmering in the distance⁸⁸ (ibid: 133).

Those thoughts about idyllic past and future – even though soothing and comforting at times – do not let the protagonists to live and enjoy the present moment. Chekhov's characters are "caught in a triple time trap, with the unsatisfying present lying between the unrecoverable past and an undiscoverable future" (McVay 1995: 51). I discussed in previous chapters that existential boredom is usually connected with romanticism. Indeed, in case of these characters permanent longing for something – better places and better times – leads to frustration and tedium. Vayl and Genis point out that the tragedy of Chekhovian people is that they are not rooted in the present which they hate and are scared of. The genuine real life passing by seems alien, unnatural and wrong to them. But a life that "should be" is a source they derive their strength from in order to overcome deadly melancholy of everyday life⁸⁹ (Genis, Vayl 1995: 186). Further they make a good point that the future in Chekhov's plays is not a continuation of the present, it is not even a process, but rather a point. Things develop not in an evolutionary, but rather revolutionary way, which implies discrete time⁹⁰ (ibid: 186).

Unlike Chekhov's characters, Hedda does not seem to idealize the past or the future. In passing she recalls her life in father's house, discusses with pleasure her previous relationship with Lovborg and indeed finds something really appealing in it ("When I think back to that time, wasn't there something beautiful, something attractive... about this... this secret intimacy"), but she is definitely far from the kind of nostalgic despair we see in the Prozorov family.

The only thing that she misses in the past is her "lust for life". From the rare conversations when she is referring to the past we can conclude that young Hedda Gabler did not suffer from boredom. Everything seemed fascinating, extraordinary and mysterious to her. Today, being married and experienced, Hedda lives with the feeling that there are no tempting secrets left. What seemed exciting and taboo is no longer that. Even adultery, as a forbidden and therefore alluring thing, does not interest Hedda. She is well aware that it is unlikely to kill her boredom.

Hedda is living in the present moment, devoid of memories and hopes, but what she sees is overwhelming boredom. In this dullness she perceives the time as something unbearably slow. Already at the beginning of her marriage life she cannot tolerate the thought of being together for a long time:

BRACK. Fortunately, the nuptial journey is at an end...

HEDDA [*shakes her head*]. The journey'll be a long one... a long one yet. I've just come to a stopping-place on the line (Ibsen 1966: 207).

Marriage appears to be an endless pointless trip with an unknown destination. Time spent with a person she doesn't love seems endless:

HEDDA. And then the most unbearable thing of all...

BRACK. Well?

HEDDA. ...everlastingly having to be together with... with the self-same person.

BRACK [*nods assentingly*]. Day in and day out... yes. Think of it... at all possible times of the...

HEDDA. I said everlastingly (ibid: 205-206).

Hedda stubbornly stresses her wording – everlastingly! That is the exact expression of her time perception. These words imply not only Hedda's objection to a particular person – Tesman, but quite as much a general dislike for monotony – sameness – and a craving for changes. Repetition is intolerable.

When it comes to the future, Hedda has no illusions about it. Everything in her new house smells like death for her and what she expects is the same old boredom:

HEDDA: Yes, it has a sort of odour of death. Like a bouquet the day after a ball. [*Clasps her hands at the back of her neck, leans back in the chair and looks at him.*] Ah, dear Mr. Brack... you just can't imagine how excruciatingly bored I'll be, out here (ibid: 212).

However, she once or twice expresses a cautious hope that something will change. While certain Chekhov's characters keep grieving about wasted time and believe that the best years are left behind, Hedda does not allow herself to think so:

HEDDA. I'd really danced myself tired, my dear sir. I had had my day... [*She gives a little shudder.*] Oh, no... I'm not going to say that. Nor think it, either" (ibid: 206).

Obviously Hedda tries to keep her mind off the thought that dullness she currently finds herself in will last for ever.

John Solensten regards Hedda's boredom as a conflict with time: "Time – past, present and future – traps and pitilessly destroys Hedda as she resists its movement with all her will and energy" (Solensten 1969: 315). He analyses all references to time in the text assuming that a fight against time is equal to a fight against boredom. I suppose the time aspect is essential, but just as a drop reflecting a wider existential picture.

Eugene Webb gives more detailed analysis of time in the play and connects Hedda's boredom with her fear of "cyclical time". This kind of time is traditionally regarded as "a type of immortality, an eternally self-renewing source of joy" (Webb 1970: 58). To Hedda, however, Webb argues, the cycle represents "an eternal monotony, a source only of boredom and repulsion" (ibid: 58). This is a better-founded conclusion: indeed, Hedda is not terrified of linear time, which implies slow extinction, getting old and dying. What she really cannot bear is cycling time – endless repetition of the same things. Moreover, it is more precise to say that Hedda is not afraid of time itself, but time passing by with no meaning – emptiness of time. Plenty of time that feels heavy because of existential boredom.

The positive cyclic perception of time – as a "self-renewing source of joy" – is rather typical for the three sisters, especially at the beginning of the play. But that attitude has some negative effects too. The cyclic perception is the reason why the three sisters ignore the opportunities that life offers them at the present moment. They look back at the idealized past and dream about the idealized future believing that everything is repeating and returning. Unlike Hedda Gabler, they consider eternal repetition as harmonic: it gives them hope that some day everything will be perfect again – as it used to be. However, as soon as the sisters start to realize that the reality is driven by other laws (by linear time), that life is changing and moving on nonstop, they adjust their attitude to life to some extent. The sisters come to conclusion that time is not discrete and they are able to do something for their future, nobody but them is responsible for it, and life is to be lived here and now. In the last scenes we see them willing to live and work and serve those who may need them. "We still have our lives ahead of us, my dears, so let's make the most of them (Chekhov 1976: 139)"⁹¹, – says Olga, and her words sound like acceptance of the present moment relevancy. Finally they find will to fight boredom and melancholy, to get over an existential crisis at the cost of disillusionment.

Unlike the three sisters, Andrey fails to modify his time perception. Throughout the play he conceives the provincial life he is a part of as an eternal repetition. People

around him seem to do the same things generation after generation – almost automatically – without questioning any existential value of their actions:

ANDREY. All these people do is eat, drink and sleep till they drop down dead. Then new ones are born to carry on the eating, drinking and sleeping. And to save themselves getting bored to tears and put a bit of spice in their lives, they go in for all this sickening gossip, vodka, gambling, litigation. Wives deceive their husbands and husbands tell lies and pretend they're deaf and blind to what's going on, and all the time the children are crushed by vulgarity, lose any spark of inspiration they might ever have had, and – like their fathers and mothers before them – turn into a lot of miserable living corpses, each one exactly like his neighbor⁹² (ibid: 133).

Boredom of philistine narrow-minded society poisons everybody. And although Andrey wishes to break this cycle, he doesn't know how and doesn't go further than complaining. He is intellectual enough to see the rotten and trivial way of life in his town, but not strong enough to take any action, break through and start a different kind of life.

Not feeling self-actualized, Uncle Vanya also stays inert. Neither can he stand the thought of keeping this way of life for long. Future life seems endless to him:

VOYNITSKY. Give me some medicine or something. Oh my God, I'm forty-seven. Suppose I live to be sixty, that means I have still thirteen years to go. It's too long. How am I to get through those thirteen years? What am I to do? How do I fill the time?⁹³ (ibid: 60).

This kind of feeling is more than natural for bored people. They have no idea what to fill their existence with, and empty life feels too long. In deep despair Voynitsky nevertheless does not give up all hopes. He reveals his secret thoughts to Astrov:

VOYNITSKY. Oh, can you think—?... [*Feverishly clutches Astrov's arm.*] Can you think what it would be like to live the rest of one's life in a new way? Oh, to wake up some fine, clear morning feeling as if you'd started living all over again, as if the past was all forgotten, gone like a puff of smoke. [*Weeps.*] To begin a new life... Tell me, how should I begin? Where do I start?⁹⁴ (ibid: 60).

Unfortunately, starting “a new life” remains a romantic undefined idea in Voynitsky’s case. It does not contain any clear plans or wishes. Astrov – being an idealist throughout the play – proves skeptical this time: “Oh, get away with you. New life indeed. Our situation’s hopeless, yours and mine” (ibid: 60).

Being drunk Uncle Vanya drops a very important remark: “When people aren’t really alive they live on illusions. It’s better than nothing anyway”⁹⁵ (ibid: 37). A more literal translation of the first line would be: “When they don’t have a *real life*, they live on illusions”. It is interesting to speculate about the cause-and-effect relation here. Do people live on illusions because they do not have a real life? Or maybe they do not have a real life *exactly* because they live on illusions? This “real”, “better”, “brighter” life is something all the mentioned Chekhov’s characters are chasing for. But in pursuit of this phantom, I believe, they lose something very essential – an ability to feel the bliss of the current moment. To see what life offers them here and now.

In *The Lady from the Sea* Doctor Wangel warns Ellida that craving for the unachievable could be dangerous and make her unhappy:

WANGEL [*quietly and sadly*]. I see it, Ellida! Step by step you are slipping away from me. This craving for the unattainable... for the limitless, for the infinite... will ultimately put your very mind in darkness (Ibsen 1966: 120).

In the same way as the three sisters are obsessed with the idea of moving back to Moscow, Ellida’s and Bolette’s romantic dreams about another life in future are connected with another place. Errol Durbach argues: “All of Chekhov’s women, like Madame Bovary, express a similar homesickness for an unknown country, or for a world out of time where the past may be redeemed and the pain of the present assuaged” (Durbach 2007: 19). The same is fair for the protagonists of *The Lady from the Sea*.

Ellida believes that not only her – all people rather belong to the sea:

ELLIDA. And I believe that people suspect something of this in themselves. And bear with it as with some secret sorrow. Believe me, here are the deepest springs of human melancholy. Yes, believe me” (Ibsen 1966: 75).

Perhaps it is not quite fair to refer to all people, but those in existential crisis are usually tortured by the feeling of “not belonging here”. They constantly hope there are better places where they can become happier at once, just by the fact of being there.

When Ellida expresses her longing for the sea and still stays where she is, it reminds of imaginary helplessness and powerlessness of Chekhov's characters: "Right across the sea. Imagine sailing with it [the boat]. If only one could. If only one could!" (ibid: 74). And here it is very tempting to ask: what is exactly the reason why one can't? Bolette remarks with a sigh: "Ah, no. We have to be content with dry land" (ibid: 74). I find this conclusion very contradictory from the existential point of view. On one hand, it is indeed wise to be satisfied with what you have, thus you can avoid suffering from missing what you cannot have. On the other hand, such a passive attitude to life leads to total inertness and fatalism, while in fact there are no absolute obstacles to change something in life. In fact, particular circumstances are often easier to change than the inner self and established way of thinking.

Accordingly, Durbach assumes that basically these dreams about the ideal and eternal, the self-delusions enrich human existence with opportunities (Durbach 2007: 27). They have potential to inspire and drive. But at the same time they contain dangerous romantic traps and temptations that can lead to madness, lost sense of reality and despair.

Wangel is apparently aware of the latter. He sees the roots of melancholy in the belief that "the grass is greener on the other side of the hill" and finds the right medicine to fight this "malady" – he simply lets Ellida go. And not very surprisingly, Ellida stays "on this side", but this time she feels that she does it of her own free will. She manages to overcome her longing for another place and another life, while Bolette goes further and decides to leave.

Bolette complains that her thirst for knowledge cannot be satisfied here, in a little provincial town: "One likes to know what is going on in the world. We are so cut off from things here. Very largely, anyway" (Ibsen 1966: 70). Further in that conversation with Arnholm she confesses that her greatest dream is to get away from her home town:

ARNHOLM. Tell me, Bolette, my dear... living in this place, isn't there something... something special I mean... you find yourself longing for?

BOLETTE. Yes, perhaps.

ARNHOLM. What sort of thing? What is it you find yourself longing for?

BOLETTE. To get away (ibid: 71).

Asking this question Arnholm probably expected to hear about some particular occupation she is craving for. But she cannot name any. Her only unclear desire is leaving, and in the second place comes learning:

ARNHOLM: That more than anything?

BOLETTE. Yes. And after that... to learn. To get to know more about all sorts of things (ibid: 71).

I already discussed that in my view Bolette does not really know where to go and what to learn. The answer “all sorts of things” sounds as general and undefined as “to get away”. Perhaps, this is an expression of existential boredom, perhaps simply a sign of her immaturity and youth.

The same wish is expressed once by Elena in *Uncle Vanya*: “Oh to fly away, free as a bird, away from you all, away from your sleepy faces and your talk, to forget that you so much as exist!”⁹⁶ (Chekhov 1976: 47). It is remarkable that Elena does not want to go to another place, but rather dreams to get away. This desire of course does not imply an intention: it is simply longing for being somewhere else and run away from present dull existence. Ironically enough, Elena wants to get away from what she represents more than anyone – from “sleepy faces”, “grey shapes” who just “eat, drink and sleep”. Elena does not seem to realize that overwhelming boredom is rather inside her than around her. In fact, by escaping external boredom, she wants to run away from her own nature which is hardly possible. Finally Elena leaves, but she simply returns to her previous life in the city. Her environment might change a little, but nothing significant will happen in her life.

When Bolette compares provincial life with living in the pond, Arnholm cautiously suggests that moving to another “milieu” can only do harm:

BOLETTE. I don’t think life is so very different for us from what it is for those carp down there in the pond. They have the fjord close by where the great shoals of wild fish move in and out. But our poor tame local fish know nothing of all this. They can never be a part of this life.

ARNHOLM. But then I don’t think it would practically suit them if they did get out there (Ibsen 1966: 71).

It is interesting to pay attention to the symbol of a pond. It is something dull, stagnant, but safe, with no wild fish, and perhaps unconsciously Bolette sticks to that

safety. In a way the fjord scares her. It is also significant that the pond is an enclosed space, something that has no run into the open sea: carp “can never be a part of this life”. There is some kind of fatalism hidden in that pond symbol.

When Bolette starts to explain the reasons why she cannot move away, this fatalism becomes more evident. She did not dare to discuss the possibility of studies with Father, because “Father doesn’t really have much initiative” and as for herself she admits – “I don’t have much initiative either” (ibid: 72).

Finally Bolette draws a pessimistic conclusion with no ground for that: “I suppose I was created to stay here in the pond” (ibid: 73). Arnholm objects to this: “Not at all. It depends entirely on you” (ibid: 73). Longing for changes, but having no will to do something about it is typical for those who suffer from existential boredom. Nothing is worth trying; apathy kills the initiative.

The same kind of fatalism can be seen in the Prozorovs. The sisters often mention God or fate as a determining factor of their not returning to Moscow:

IRINA. If I can’t go to Moscow, well, I can’t, and that’s that. It’s just the way things have turned out. It can’t be helped, it’s all God’s will and that’s the truth⁹⁷ (Chekhov 1976: 128).

As for Bolette, eventually she manages to overcome her passivity and fears and agrees to leave with Arnholm. We do not know if that will bring her peace of mind, neither do we know if life in Moscow would make the sisters fully satisfied. The Russian critics Vayl and Genis do not believe in their future happiness: “Simple moving would not help Chekov’s protagonists. In fact, it doesn’t matter where they live: in a village or in a city, in Russia or abroad – no place is good enough”⁹⁸ (Genis, Vayl 1995: 185). I do share these doubts because romantic minds are insatiable by definition. I assume Bolette’s belief that she will really live her life and enjoy it as soon as she gets away from home, is quite an illusion. Life is what is going on here and now while she is dreaming about future sunshine existence.

The essential difference between the Prozorovs and Bolette is that Chekhov’s characters yearn for the things they once possessed but lost. Errol Durbach develops the concept of “paradise garden”, or “lost Edenic world”, in relation to Ibsen’s and Chekhov’s plays:

The idea of a 'Paradise garden' is one of the many pervasive images that link the drama of Chekhov to a late Nineteenth Century vision of a lost or uprooted world – once a landscape of absolute value, and now an Eden from which the protagonists have been irrevocably driven. Trapped in the world outside Paradise, mired in what Ibsen calls the "chasm" of failure and mortality and human fallibility, the protagonists of these plays continue to long for that lost Edenic world. In the intensity of their Romantic yearning, they attempt once again to achieve the impossible: to re-enter the forbidden or devastated garden in order to redeem themselves from degradation and disappointment (Durbach 2007: 17-18).

It is of course tempting to assume that the three sisters and Hedda regard this lost paradise as lost aristocratic power, but as I already discussed in the Chapter 2 I doubt that Ibsen and Chekhov were particularly preoccupied with the problems of upper class and reorganization of class society. Their characters never really mention any specific attributes of their past life that they want back. I believe their nostalgia, especially in the case of Chekhov's three sisters, is of a general existential nature. They "скучают" (skuchayut) in both meanings of this Russian word – they *feel bored* and *miss* something looking back at the time when they were innocent, careless and happy. Perhaps, it is what Svendsen calls "the grief of a lost childhood" (Svendsen 2005: 150). When it comes to Hedda, she surely misses wealthier life in the general's house, but what she misses even more is the time when life seemed amazing and mysterious. Apart from that, she apparently misses the harmonic world where people were capable of romantic heroism ("vine leaves" or decent death). Hedda misses extraordinary people and extraordinary events. And she longs not for beautiful things, but for beautiful actions.

As to Ellida, Errol Durbach also finds the source of her dissatisfaction in her romantic nature, rather than in some social context:

Ellida's yearning may express itself in the language of the middle-class neurosis, but it articulates – no less urgently than Hedda Gabler's – a desperate romantic need to burst out of time into infinity, and out of nature into the supernatural. And... 'det ukjente', 'det grenselose og endelose', 'det uoppnaelige' (III, 380) – are those same qualities of Paradise for which all Ibsen's Romantics yearn (Durbach 1982: 157).

The scholar expresses his doubts in the possibility of Ellida's future happiness because she is "amphibian":

She speaks of having been made for the sea. But, in truth, she is an amphibian tragically ‘at home’ in neither element and caught, like so many Ibsen’s other protagonists, between equally terrifying and attractive impulses – contradictory needs for the human and the superhuman, the mutable and the imperishable, the pleasurable and the necessary (ibid: 157).

Both Ibsen’s and Chekhov’s characters when longing for another time or another place in fact hope that their existence “in a different dimension” will be filled with existential content – with a meaning that will somehow come by itself. Sure it is unlikely to happen, and the characters will probably just go through new disappointments.

Developing the concept of “lost paradise” Durbach gives an *existential* interpretation of it – the protagonists desperately long for “a vanished Paradise of meaning and significance, where life’s tragic enigma will find an answer, and where the soul will recover its satisfaction, they are powerless against the harsh realities of the world that demands decisions and choice” (ibid: 20). Longing for meaning is the true root of their unhappiness, apathy and escaping reality. Unlike Hedda, Chekhov’s characters are more explicit about their search for meaning and at times seem to be close to finding it, get the scent of it, but soon realize that it is just another illusion and they have to keep on searching. Or simply admit this existence as it is without further questions:

SONYA. Life must go on. [*Pause.*] And our life will go on, Uncle Vanya. We shall live through a long succession of days and endless evenings. We shall bear patiently the trials fate has in store for us. We shall work for others – now and in our old age – never knowing any peace. And when our time comes we shall die without complaining⁹⁹ (Chekhov 1976: 67).

Sonya sees salvation in humility, work and quiet resignation to the fate. Although the future seems endless and life – meaningless, it is worth living. Because life is a gift in itself.

7. Ways out of boredom

In previous chapters I already touched upon the ways Ibsen's and Chekhov's characters attempt to fight existential boredom. Here I will try to discuss this issue in more detail.

Hedda is the one who chooses perhaps the most destructive ways out of boredom. She does not only rush to her own destruction, but also destructs everything on her way by manipulating the fates of people around her. The most innocent example of her manipulation is that she wants her husband to become a politician, but it is quite obvious that her wish is something she is making up this very moment. Next day she will probably dream of her husband being a banker. What she wants is to feel her power over people, and in the second place – to kill her boredom. When Brack asks her to explain the reason why those strange ideas come to her mind, she says: "Because I am bored, d'you hear!" (Ibsen 1966: 212). Out of boredom and apparently other motives she also tries to turn Lovborg into an obedient puppet. In a way she succeeds in that, but it does not bring her much satisfaction.

"Against boredom the gods themselves fight in vain", – wrote Friedrich Nietzsche (Nietzsche 1991: 176). However, it is hard to say whether Hedda Gabler lost her struggle against existential boredom. At the end of the play her overriding desire to escape from dullness is indeed realized, though tragically. Having failed to find a subjective meaning neither in work nor in love, Hedda died.

I would not like to simplify Hedda's tragic end by saying that her suicide is a fight against boredom in itself. Hedda is of course more than ambiguous and should not be regarded merely as a victim of boredom. She cannot be reduced to this because she is definitely not just one thing and not driven by just one motive. However, an excess (or the highest pitch) of boredom could be described as a lack of interest in life itself and that's what Hedda truly lacks. Her suicide does not look like a desperate impulse or a spontaneous decision. In my eyes Hedda's death is more or less logical and predictable. This is her existential choice – her last-ditch attempt to fight her profound boredom. Death is also the only drastically new thing in the world where everything looks hoary and clichéd. Walter Benjamin stated in *Zentralpark*: "For people as they are today there is only one thing that is radically new – and it is always the same: death" (Benjamin 1991: 668). Death is indeed an extreme form of salvation. Suicide implies after all the realization of Hedda's ideal – to die in beauty. Her utter idealism

wins, and boredom is overcome. As Errol Durbach puts it: “Absolute freedom is death, ‘the last lover’” (Durbach 1982: 161).

Svendsen describing a paradoxical relationship between boredom and death points out that profound boredom “has to do with finitude and nothingness” and therefore it is already “some sort of death”, “a death within life, a non-life” (Svendsen 2005: 40-41). At the same time eventual death implies “a total break with boredom” (ibid: 40).

It is worth to remember: according to existentialists, an individual realizes that his existence contains inherent value only in critical – *existentially boundary, or frontier* – situations: struggle, suffering, fear, death etc. By apprehending himself as a self-valued being, an individual gains genuine freedom. In some cases this freedom can be reached only by such an extreme means – suicide.

Several times throughout the play *Uncle Vanya* Voynitsky expresses his wish to break with boredom in such a radical way, too. Yet, eventually he chooses to continue this “non-life”.

At the beginning of the play *Uncle Vanya*, expressing suicidal thoughts, does not seem to have serious intentions to commit a suicide. Death appears to be just as boring as other usual topics of conversation. In a small talk about the weather Voynitsky, very casually, mentions a possibility of suicide:

ELENA. It’s a perfect day. Not too hot.

[Pause.]

VOYNITSKY. It’s a perfect day. For a man to hang himself¹⁰⁰ (Chekhov 1976: 26).

It is remarkable though that this suicidal thought is passed over and left without any comment. Suicide is mentioned in the middle of a cliché discussion about weather and sounds like something equally trivial.

Later Voynitsky seems to proceed to action. First his intention was to kill Professor Serebryakov as Voynitsky considers him to be guilty for all his miseries (“You’ve ruined my life!”). Then, in the last act, perhaps when he finally realizes that there is nobody else but himself he can blame for his wasted life, he steals a bottle of morphia from Doctor Astrov’s case. The doctor, in a very prosy tone, asks Voynitsky to give it back and at the same time even gives him advice how to commit a suicide better:

ASTROV. Look here, if you're so terribly keen on doing yourself in, why not go into the woods and blow your brains out there? But do give me back that morphia or people will start talking and putting two and two together and they'll end up thinking I gave it to you. It'll be quite bad enough having to do the post-mortem. You don't suppose that will be exactly fun, do you?¹⁰¹ (ibid: 61)

The post-mortem is boring, "no fun", and death appears to be nothing special – boring. He asks Sonya to help him with getting back morphia. "Besides, I'm in a hurry, I ought to be off"¹⁰² (ibid: 61), – he says. He does not want to take the time and talk things over, to comfort Voynitsky, perhaps to persuade him from committing a suicide. The wish to die is not taken seriously. Or maybe Astrov is also so existentially exhausted that he has no words to prove that life is worth living. Sonya is the only one who can show sincere compassion for Uncle Vanya and find the right words for him:

SONYA. Give it back, Uncle Vanya. I daresay I'm no less unhappy than you, but I don't give way to despair. I put up with things patiently and that's how I mean to go on till my life comes to its natural end. You must be patient as well¹⁰³ (ibid: 61).

Finally Voynitsky gives morphia back and cries out in despair: "But we must hurry up and start work, we must do something quickly, or else I just can't carry on"¹⁰⁴ (ibid: 62). Sonya readily agrees. Thus, work proves to be the only real salvation for Uncle Vanya. It keeps him from glum thoughts, boredom and even death.

For Elena Andreevna there seem to be no way out of it. She appears to be doomed to eternal boredom though she is unlikely to reflect too much about the roots of it or ways out of it. Boredom blankets her; it has become a natural part of her personality and thus does not provoke too much suffering. It is so profound that Elena has no will to even try to fight it. Neither is she able to commit a suicide like Hedda. In the Act I Voynitsky defines her state as "too lazy to live" if literally translated from Russian. "If you could only see your face and the way you move. It's as if life was too much for you, altogether too much"¹⁰⁵ (ibid: 28), – he says bitterly. She admits: "Dear me, it is, and I'm so bored too"¹⁰⁶ (ibid: 28). Elena is apparently equally lazy to live and to die. Stendhal writes in *On Love*: "Ennui takes everything from one, even the desire to take one's own life" (Stendhal 1995: 288).

There is another significant thing that distinguishes Elena from Hedda. They are both destructive, but the difference is that Hedda hurts deliberately while Elena appears

to be unaware of her destructive power – she makes mischief and breaks hearts “by accident”.

Unlike them, the three sisters do no harm to anybody but themselves. They are sinking in self-destruction and depression. Irina failing to find her place in life feels so extremely superfluous that she asks her sisters to “throw her out”: “Why don’t you get rid of me, throw me out? I can’t stand it anymore” (Chekhov 1976: 119). In the original Russian text this line is written not as a question, but as an imperative: “Выбросьте меня, выбросьте!” Irina is the only one in *Three Sisters* who feels so desperate that she is close to suicide: “Why am I still alive, why haven’t I done away with myself? I don’t know”¹⁰⁷ (ibid: 119). The will to die and the will to live are conflicting in Irina, and by the end of the play the latter wins.

Conveying a sulky mood most of the time, amazingly enough, both Chekhov’s plays leave a strong feeling of hope. *Three sisters* ends with cheerful music and touching words full of faith in life:

MASHA. ...We shall be left alone to begin our lives again. We must go on living, we must¹⁰⁸ (ibid: 138).

IRINA. Life must go on, we must work and work and think of nothing else (ibid: 139).

OLGA. We still have our lives ahead of us, my dears, so let’s make the most of them (ibid: 139).

Some critics did not manage to catch the optimistic tone of this final scene. The religious philosopher Dmitry Merezhkovsky argued that in *Three Sisters* “all the characters seem to have died long ago” and continued to live by inertia (Merezhkovsky 1906: 17). Obviously the characters’ failure to find spiritual support in faith seemed like a dead-end to Merezhkovsky. Another Russian philosopher Lev Shestov was even more hard-line in his conclusions:

Chekhov was a singer of hopelessness... He killed human hopes... Art, science, love, inspiration, ideals, future – once Chekhov has touched them immediately fade, wither and die... In Chekhov’s hands everything died (Shestov 1908).

Despite this view shared by many Chekhov's contemporaries, there were few who found optimism in his plays. William Gerhardt was one of the first critics who were able to comprehend the contradictory essence of Chekhov's plays:

Chekhov, though the melancholy beauty of his plays and stories is the melancholy of a transitory world, cannot be called a pessimist... Chekhov was neither pessimist nor optimist. To him life is neither horrible nor happy, but unique, strange, fleeting, beautiful and awful... (Gerhardt 1923: 21).

Accordingly, the Russian writer Leonid Andreev rejected the view that *Three Sisters* is a deeply pessimistic work. He described its "basic tragic melody" as a strong "longing to live", an urgent call "to life, freedom and happiness" (Andreev 1913: 321-325). There is reason to hope that this longing to live will help the three sisters to find their place in the world and shake off melancholy and boredom.

In general, it is probably fair to say that existential boredom, experienced by each of the three sisters to some extent, is overcome by lust for life – something that Hedda had lost long before the play started. While in Hedda's case existential emptiness is absolute, in the Prozorovs' case it appears to be something transitory, impermanent. It is followed by questioning the meaning of life and a genuine wish to find it. Even though Chebutykin keeps saying in the last scene his favorite refrain "none of it matters, nothing matters", that search gives the sisters strength to go on.

The sisters seem to accept that it is close to impossible to comprehend the universal meaning of life – the master plan. Probably people will find out it some day, but that will happen in the remote future:

IRINA [*puts her head on Olga's breast*]. What is all this for? Why all this suffering? The answer will be known one day, and then there will be no more mysteries left, but till then life must go on, we must work and work and think of nothing else. I'll go off alone tomorrow to teach at a school and spend my whole life serving those who may need me¹⁰⁹ (Chekhov 1976: 138-139).

Like Uncle Vanya and Olga, Irina finally sees her subjective meaning in work. She mentions that she will start a new – teaching – job, which implies direct contact with people and helping them.

Universal meaning is no longer really sought because it is considered to be beyond human understanding. I dare to say that both Chekhov's plays discussed here end with a humble submission to meaningless and joyless work.

It is striking that Svendsen analyzing boredom in relation to meaning withdrawal did not discuss Camus' conception of absurd and his well-known essay "The Myth Of Sisyphus" (1942). According to the philosophy of absurd, man is in futile search for meaning, unity and clarity in the face of a cold and silent universe deprived of God. The absurd arises when the man's need to understand meets the pointlessness of the world, when "my appetite for the absolute and for unity" meets "the impossibility to reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle" (Camus 1983: 51). An individual, like in Ibsen's and especially Chekhov's plays, longs for harmony with the world while the world remains indifferent or even hostile. Awareness of absurd means a keen realization of this disharmony that brings about such feelings as angst, loneliness, boredom and melancholy.

Sisyphus who is condemned to push a rock up the mountain again and again only to see it roll down is a genuine absurd hero. He is aware of meaningless of life in general and futility of his efforts in particular. Clear understanding of that meaningless, accepting it and capability for reflection make him a rebel. If he had any illusions remained and any hope to succeed, his labour would lose its torment. But Sisyphus is clearly conscious of his tragedy. An individual devoid of illusions and existing in a meaningless world is an absurd man in terms of Camus' philosophy. In this regard many of Chekhov's characters are doing a Sisyphean task ("futile and hopeless labor") being trapped in endless monotonous activities of everyday life. By the end of the play the three sisters, Uncle Vanya and Sonya are totally disillusioned and trying to face reality as it is. It gives them some kind of new inspiration and strength to move on.

The most existential questions of all – the question of suicide – is extremely essential in that context and was already discussed above. While Hedda and Lovborg do not share any suicidal thoughts, but in the end commit a suicide, Chekhov's protagonists, on the contrary, reflect a lot about death, but finally find inner resources to live on. To be or not to be when life seems meaningless is a question Ibsen's and Chekhov's characters give different answers to. Camus in his essay also raises this important question: does the realization of life absurdity require suicide? His answer is – no, it requires revolt. Sisyphus' absurd reasoning helps him to develop his own meaning of life which is understood as constant ascent by him: "His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing" (Camus 1975: 63). This personally developed meaning is

hard to shake and a reason to live. The Camus' essay concludes: "The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (ibid: 123). Struggling starts with acknowledging the contradiction between the desire of human reason and the unreasonable world. All idols and illusions must be rejected. Deprived of hope and meaning, an absurd man gains endless freedom and even happiness in return.

Accepting meaningless and yet struggling and living on – that's what the protagonists of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* do, and in that sense they follow Camus' conception of existential revolt. The difference is perhaps that they do not give up universal meaning completely. The sisters and Sonya (also Uncle Vanya to some extent) still believe that the answer to everything is yet to be found, but probably not by them and not in this life. Having accepted absurdity of their existence they ultimately find a path to hope and faith in Meaning, and thus cannot be regarded as truly absurd heroes. This faith is perhaps the only real thing that keeps Chekhov's characters from suicide.

As to Hedda, she acts as if she has given up both personal and universal meaning before the curtain rises. At least her search for meaning is not that evident and totally devoid of verbal expression. Hedda looks fully lost in her boredom and does not see anything worthy to worry about and live for.

The same goes for Chekhov's Elena to a great extent. Martin Nag argues: "Hedda and Elena are, tragically enough, superficial persons, though in different ways" (Nag 1967: 132). Perhaps Nag's diagnosis implies that both women do not seek a meaning. Elena indeed does not seem to be very preoccupied with finding a reason to live, but at the same time has no sufficient reason to die. And thus she continues to live this half-life, drown in her boredom, with no wishes, no ambitions, and no aspirations. In fact, her boredom could hardly be qualified as existential. Indeed, existential boredom as I see it is always related to self-reflection and suffering. Camus emphasizes that the myth about Sisyphus is tragic only because "its hero is conscious". Other characters discussed here suffer from failing to find their place in life and being aware of that. And Elena feeling endlessly bored does not seem to see a big tragedy in that. Her boredom is her style of life, and she unlikely regards it as some kind of discord. In a way, her indifference is in harmony with the indifferent universe.

Apart from accepting meaninglessness there is one more important thing that could help to get over boredom: "There is possibly one sure cure for boredom – to leave Romanticism behind" (Svendsen 2005: 100). Svendsen quotes Andy Warhol:

“People’s fantasies are what gives them problems” (Warhol 1975: 199). This is very close to the Schopenhauer’s advice to minimize expectations and abandon demands that are too great. Indeed, by renouncing every romantic dream of a better life (e.g. in another place, in another time) it is possible to start feeling true engagement in the present life and avoid many disappointments.

Some of the characters seem to manage it: the sisters more or less come back down to earth by the end of the play, Ellida “finds her way back to the everyday” (Moi 2006: 319). However, Bolette and Andrey seem to stick to their illusions. Trying to find a way out of dreary existence Andrey finds solace in hopes for the future. He has a strong belief that he and his children will see a different life:

ANDREY. I see a light glimmering in the distance, I have a vision of freedom. I see myself and my children freed from idleness and drinking kvass and suffering ourselves with goose and cabbage, freed from our after-dinner naps and this vile habit of trying to get something for nothing¹¹⁰ (Chekhov 1976: 133).

This kind of perfect life, paradoxically enough, might turn out to be equally or even more boring. Svendsen assumes the same: “On closer inspection, all utopias seem to be deadly boring, because only that which is imperfect is interesting. It is boring to read about utopias, and they all appear to be boring” (Svendsen 2005: 138). Indeed, will an individual feel truly happy in a perfect world where all his needs are satisfied and all his wishes are fulfilled? Most likely not.

Gordon McVay argues that the sisters’ idealism is a positive drive – that’s what keeps them spiritually alive:

The Prozorovs may sometimes be insensitive and comic, unduly passive or fatalistic. Yet, they are pointing in the right direction, and embody a vast spiritual yearning, a longing for the ideal. They are seeking happiness, love, satisfying work, the meaning of life, perhaps faith. Since these goals are so elusive, it is hardly surprising that they fail to achieve them – but the search goes on, and at the end of Act IV the sisters remain determined to live and work and seek (McVay 1995: 79).

It is indeed very hard to say if romantic impulses cause more harm or benefit. On one hand, idealism can lead to chronic frustration and dissatisfaction with the present. On the other hand, it can stimulate and inspire to work for new achievements.

The same is fair for boredom. It is a highly ambiguous and multidimensional phenomenon. It can result in both further *self-destruction* and *self-development*:

Boredom pulls things out of their usual contexts. It can open ways up for a new configuration of things and therefore also for a new meaning, by virtue of the fact that it has already deprived things of meaning. Boredom, because of its negativity, contains the possibility of a positive turn-around. As I've mentioned before, boredom gives you a perspective on your own existence, where you realize your own insignificance in the greater context (Svendsen 2005: 142).

It had the most negative and destructive effect on Hedda and the most inspiring – on Olga and Irina even though the latter did not manifest itself immediately.

“The creation of value out of nothingness” (Durbach 1982: 153) is attainable in Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays. A subjective meaning proves to be possible to find. Those characters, who manage to find a way out of existential crisis, resort either to work and studies (Olga, Irina, Uncle Vanya, Bolette) or marriage and family life (Ellida, Andrey). It is indeed remarkable and striking that none of the characters seems to find salvation in love. Love – probably the most sought-after existential value – remains an unachievable romantic dream – so elusive and fragile that one cannot rely on it.

8. Conclusions

Examining boredom I proceeded from the assumption that as a complex phenomenon it could be discussed in relation to both society and the self. I suppose the dramatic changes inherent in modernity are not something universal that equalizes people and affects their minds in the same way. Certain individuals are simply more receptive to those changes. Boredom becomes more widespread in our epoch, but it does not turn into a “malady” of the whole society. Some people simply stick to the traditional roles and are fully satisfied with them. But most people start realizing that there are no eternal ready-made values anymore. All they are left with is a personal existential choice and a personal responsibility for that choice. Those who fail to generate a subjective meaning of life (a meaning that could replace lost traditional and

religious values) cannot find solace and satisfaction – and therefore suffer from existential boredom.

Thus, boredom surely has some objective preconditions, but at the same time it is a very personal experience caused by existential vacuum of an individual. I decided to focus on the subjective level of the characters' boredom and avoid discussing it in the larger – social and historical – context even though this approach is absolutely valid. In my research I tried to examine the motif of existential boredom in Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays. I have come to conclusion that the two playwrights have quite different ways of developing this motif.

Following his own principle – “on stage everything should be just as complicated and just as simple as in life” – Chekhov introduces the motif of boredom as an *intrinsic* part of life. In his “anti-dramatic” theatre boredom becomes not just a key motif, but a dominant mood, an atmosphere of the plays. It is an element of dramaturgy which is meant to reflect “life as it is” where people are not always involved in dramatic conflicts, but also feel bored and talk of trivialities. The well-known “Chekhov's gun” principle (“If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired. Otherwise don't put it there”)¹¹¹ is being regularly broken in Chekhov's plays. His characters do and say lots of things that are not particularly important for the action development, because that's what people do in “real life”. Ibsen in my view seems to be more consistent with this “gun's principle” – even literally: Hedda's pistols introduced in the first act are indeed used later on, even twice.

What we find in Chekhov's texts is an inner drama of the characters stuck in stagnant, hopeless, oppressive circumstances and unhappy marriages. They struggle to make sense of their lives, but fail, because life is “an insoluble problem”. Boredom is in the air; it fills the stage and blankets Chekhov's characters who are half-living half-sleeping in provincial Russian towns. Unlike Ibsen's demonic and bright characters, Chekhov tends to picture ordinary, weak people oppressed by the “immortal commonplaces of life”.

To put it in another way – everyday routinized life is what constitutes Chekhov's plays while in Ibsen's works it is just a background for dramatic events. That is why I would say that Chekhovian boredom is a context, whereas Ibsenian boredom is rather something that stands out from the context.

Chekhov's characters do suffer from boredom, but at the same time they seem to realize that it is inherent in everyday life – unavoidable. They manage to assimilate

to it to some extent and find their ways to fight it. In contrast to this, boredom is perceived as strange, alien to Ibsen's characters – something that is unbearable to live with. Hedda is apparently unable to accept boredom. The story of Bolette is not as tragic, but her dull existence is also something foreign to the overall mood of *The Lady from the Sea*. This bored daydreaming girl looks like a pale shadow. Against the background of Ellida's dramatic choice her story seems uninteresting and even dissonant to the play.

Apart from this, I have found out that Ibsen and Chekhov have also much in common when it comes to conceptual representation of boredom. In most cases boredom is presented as existential which implies the loss of meaning and romantic dissatisfaction with the reality. Lars Svendsen and Viktor Frankl argue that human ability to reflection inevitably results in craving for meaning. The protagonists feeling existential vacuum try to find a subjective meaning in the two most essential spheres of life – work and love. Hedda, however, suffers from such a profound boredom that she seems to have given up the search for meaning. Perhaps this is the reason why Hedda's existential crisis manifests itself in the most destructive way – first by cruel manipulation and then by suicide. I assumed in my research that death – in Hedda's and to some extent in Lovborg's cases – was some sort of a tragic way to overcome boredom.

None of the Chekhov's characters discussed here commits a suicide though some of them consider this radical way of solving life's problems. Like Hedda, they feel unbearable existential emptiness. The difference lies in the way they express it. They complain a lot and cry in despair, but, unlike Hedda, they cause no harm to anyone but themselves, they are rather self-destructive.

Besides, their craving for meaning is more evident than that of Ibsen's characters. Chekhov's characters constantly question both subjective meaning and general Meaning of life believing that “either you know what you're living for, or else the whole thing's a waste of time and means less than nothing” (Chekhov 1976: 100). In the last scenes the protagonists of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* have to admit that universal ultimate Meaning is beyond human understanding, and thus they should hold onto individual values.

Work is one of such significant values, though not a panacea. As we have seen, there is no direct relation between existential boredom and work/idleness. Nevertheless, it is evident that without meaningful occupation the individual is confronted with nothingness and experiences existential vacuum.

Tatyana Shakh-Azizova argues that “there is no single happy family, no happy love story in Chekhov’s plays, no-one finds solace in labour – work is either hard and boring like in Sonya’s, Uncle Vanya’s, Olga’s and Irina’s cases or does not find acceptance like Astrov’s work”¹¹²... (Shakh-Azizova 1966: 35). I find this statement quite disputable. It is true that the characters do not find solace in love and get more and more lonely and isolated, but work eventually becomes a form of salvation for some of them. Labour is indeed hard and boring, but the reassuring meaning of it is that it is needed by other people. It is perhaps fair to say that Chekhov’s characters sacrifice their desire for self-actualization to serving others.

This existential choice comes to the Chekhov’s characters through numerous disillusionments and disappointments. Their romantic nature, permanent craving for more (often referring to another time or place) is torturing them throughout the plays, but gets reduced by the end. This contributes to their recovery from an existential crisis. In contrast to that, Ibsen’s characters (Hedda and Bolette) fail to overcome their romanticism. Hedda sticks to her hazy high ideals to the bitter end and dies oppressed by them. Bolette remains enthralled by illusions and sells her actual freedom in hope to gain financial and – which is more important – *existential* freedom and to find her real self. In my opinion she is unlikely to achieve self-realization at such a price.

The only Ibsen’s character discussed here who succeeds to get rid of romantic obsessions is Ellida. As soon as she realizes that she is the one who is fully responsible for her existential choice, she goes back to the reality, her “down-to-earth” family and finally finds peace of mind even though we cannot know if it will last.

The protagonist who does not manage to overcome boredom in any way is Elena from *Uncle Vanya*. On one hand she obviously lacks crucial existential values – like work and love – but on the other hand she does not seem to need them. She does express incidentally her wish for a different life, but does not suffer so much from not having it. Elena never questions a subjective meaning in life; that is why regarding her boredom as existential would be an exaggeration. Her apathy and indifference is so strong and overall that Elena seems to be deprived of any emotions at all, nothing really touches her. Whilst other bored protagonists of both Ibsen’s and Chekhov’s plays go through various inner transformations and find their ways out of existential crisis – even such a radical way as death – Elena’s boredom remains unchangeable and insuperable.

Even though I have chosen for my thesis a very narrow topic and a limited number of plays, this kind of literary research can never be comprehensive. In conclusion I would like to say that studying the motif of existential boredom has given me new psychological and philosophical perspectives on Ibsen's and Chekhov's characters in particular and human craving for meaning in general. Initially I was afraid for an obvious reason that an analysis of boredom would simply turn out to be too boring. However, I must admit that boredom, being a symptom of severe existential problems, reveals them in such a peculiar and ambiguous way that it was truly interesting for me.

9. References

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- ¹ Knut Brynhildsvoll (2002), Errol Durbach (1982, 2007), Martin Esslin (1999), Antonija Gospodinova (2001), Vladimir Kataev (1989, 2002), Martin Lamm (1947), Martin Nag (1967, 1970, 1971, 1997), Margarita Odesskaja (2007), John B. Priestley (2005), Walter L. Reed (1977), Tatyana Shakh-Azizova (1966), etc.
- ² Som liter? rt fenomen betraktet kommer Tsjekhov ETTER Ibsen. Og det er fristende a sette dem opp mot hverandre og sporre: Pa hvilken mate har Tsjekhov fatt impulser fra Ibsen?
- ³ Sporsmalet er komplisert. En sammenheng ER der. Men er den direkte eller indirekte? Tsjekhov viderefører Ibsen – og bryter samtidig med ham og skaper noe nytt. Men han behøver ikke av den grunn a v?re "pavirket" av ham.
- ⁴ De er alle av Heddas slekt. De er bokstavelig talt hennes ektefodte sore, – sett i et perspektiv av skapende kunstnerisk 'pavirkning'.
- ⁵ Bade Ibsen og Tsjekhov evner a skape livaktige skikkelser; men der Ibsen dybde-borer psykologisk lyttende, antyder Tsjekhov – i lag pa lag av nyanser.
- ⁶ Der Ibsen er sjelens realist, er Tsjekhov sjelens impresjonist.
- ⁷ Ibsen-“eleven” Tsjekhov blir mester og en ny “1? rer”.
- ⁸ Кризисность проникает во все клетки общества: в политику и внутреннюю жизнь, в культуру, быт, мораль.
- ⁹ ...показать не открытый и яркий драматизм выламывающихся из повседневности событий, а потаенный трагизм самого хода жизни.
- ¹⁰ Принцип трагического в повседневности выдержан им с абсолютной последовательностью.
- ¹¹ Ибсен, вынужденный изображать повседневность, постоянно взрывает ее – эксцентричностью своих героев, необычностью их характеров, судеб, стремлений. Трагизм этих героев именно в том, что они не могут ассимилироваться с повседневностью – ими, как и драматургом, владеет тоска по исключительному.
- ¹² Герои в пьесах Чехова обрисованы не так резко и схематично. ...Чехов с доброй иронией показывает нам их слабости. ...Чехов... не судит, не «наказывает». Ибсен, как правило, более суров к своим героям.
- ¹³ В основе новой пьесы Чехова лежит мысль о том, что существующие социальные условия бытия враждебны человеку.
- ¹⁴ социально-исторический детерминизм
- ¹⁵ ...человек интересуется Чехова главным образом не как социальный тип.
- ¹⁶ Smerten ved tilv?relsen opplever Hedda tidvis som klaustrofobi, tidvis som kjedsomhet og lede.
- ¹⁷ Det tragiske manifesterer seg for Hedda i opplevelsen av leden, som er en tilstand hvor all mening opploses.
- ¹⁸ Он, как никто, умел поведать о скуке и бессодержательности жизни.
- ¹⁹ by P. Farfan P., T. Franz, K. Johansen, E. Lester, R. Olesen, L. Rose, A. Solomon, B. Wicklund, etc.

²⁰ Восприятие Чехова как писателя, демонстрировавшего ненормальность уклада русской жизни (из чего следовал логический вывод о необходимости радикальных перемен), было свойственно большинству советских литературоведов, в том числе таким глубоким исследователям, как Г. А. Бялый, А. П. Скафтымов и Н. Я. Берковский.

²¹ отражение предреволюционной общественной обстановки в стране

²² ...возросшим критическим отношением писателя как к современной ему действительности, так и к русской интеллигенции, с одной стороны, ощущением надвигающихся решительных перемен в жизни России, с другой.

²³ антибуржуазная тенденция

²⁴ Конфликт героя со средой, с жизнью всегда в какой-то момент трансформируется в конфликт внутри самого героя.

²⁵ Все делается не по-нашему.

²⁶ Безусловно, Гедда – интересная, незаурядная личность, ее угнетают пошлость и посредственность, вести серую и однообразную жизнь для нее невыносимо. Этим Гедда очень напоминает чеховских героев, которых калечит ровная, скучная, однообразная жизнь; которых везде окружает пошлость и которые никак не могут реализовать свои способности. Но при этом Гедда ведет себя агрессивно и жестоко по отношению к окружающим.

²⁷ Беда у них одна и та же: они не имеют высших руководящих жизненных начал.

²⁸ ...и через миллион лет жизнь останется такою же, как и была; она не меняется, остается постоянною, следуя своим собственным законам, до которых вам нет дела или, по крайней мере, которых вы никогда не узнаете. Перелетные птицы, журавли, например, летят и летят, и какие бы мысли, высокие или малые, ни бродили в их головах, все же будут лететь и не знать, зачем и куда. Они летят и будут лететь, какие бы философы ни завелись среди них; и пускай философствуют, как хотят, лишь бы летели...

²⁹ Маша. Все-таки смысл?

Тузенбах. Смысл... Вот снег идет. Какой смысл?

³⁰ Мне кажется, человек должен быть верующим или должен искать веры, иначе жизнь его пуста, пуста... Жить и не знать, для чего журавли летят, для чего дети рождаются, для чего звезды на небе... Или знать, для чего живешь, или же все пустяки, трын-трава.

³¹ ...или - или, два полюса, на одном из которых - абсолютное знание, на другом - столь же абсолютное безразличие, "трын-трава".

³² Скучно жить на этом свете, господа!

³³ ...кажется, еще немного, и мы узнаем, зачем мы живем, зачем страдаем... Если бы знать, если бы знать!

³⁴ Ирина [*кладет голову на грудь Ольге*]. Придет время, все узнают, зачем все это, для чего эти страдания, никаких не будет тайн.

³⁵ Chekhov to V.S. Miroljubov, 17 December 1901 (Chekhov 1994).

³⁶ Я чувствую, как из меня выходят каждый день по каплям и силы, и молодость.

³⁷ Ирина. Когда я сегодня проснулась, встала и умылась, то мне вдруг стало казаться, что для меня все ясно на этом свете, и я знаю, как надо жить. Милый Иван Романыч, я знаю все. Человек

должен трудиться, работать в поте лица, кто бы он ни был, и в этом одном заключается смысл и цель его жизни, его счастье, его восторги.

³⁸ не работал ни разу в жизни

³⁹ Пришло время, надвигается на всех нас громада, готовится здоровая, сильная буря, которая идет, уже близка и скоро сдует с нашего общества лень, равнодушие, предубеждение к труду, гнилую скуку. Я буду работать, а через какие-нибудь 25-30 лет работать будет уже каждый человек. Каждый!

⁴⁰ Я не буду работать.

⁴¹ Работать нужно, работать. Оттого нам невесело и смотрим мы на жизнь так мрачно, что не знаем труда. Мы родились от людей, презиравших труд...

⁴² ...лучше быть волом, лучше быть простою лошадью, только бы работать.

⁴³ Чеховские герои мечутся по сцене в поисках роли. Они жаждут избавиться от своей никчемности, от мучительной свободы быть никем, от необходимости просто жить, а не строить жизнь.

⁴⁴ Надо поискать другую должность, а эта не по мне. Чего я так хотела, о чем мечтала, того-то в ней именно и нет. Труд без поэзии, без мыслей...

⁴⁵ О, я несчастная... Не могу я работать, не стану работать. Довольно, довольно! Была телеграфисткой, теперь служу в городской управе и ненавижу, презираю все, что только мне дают делать... Мне уже двадцать четвертый год, работаю уже давно, и мозг высох, похудела, подурнела, постарела, и ничего, ничего, никакого удовлетворения, а время идет, и все кажется, что уходишь от настоящей прекрасной жизни, уходишь все дальше и дальше, в какую-то пропасть. Я в отчаянии, я в отчаянии! И как я жива, как не убила себя до сих пор, не понимаю...

⁴⁶ Она прекрасна, спора нет, но... ведь она только ест, спит, гуляет, чарует всех нас своею красотой – и больше ничего. У нее нет никаких обязанностей, на нее работают другие... Ведь так? А праздная жизнь не может быть чистою.

⁴⁷ Впрочем, быть может, я отношусь слишком строго.

⁴⁸ Елена Андреевна. (*С тоской.*) Я умираю от скуки, не знаю, что мне делать.

Соня (*пожимая плечами*). Мало ли дела? Только бы захотела.

Елена Андреевна. Например?

Соня. Хозяйством занимайся, учи, лечи. Мало ли? Вот когда тебя и папы здесь не было, мы с дядей Ваней сами ездили на базар мукой торговать.

Елена Андреевна. Не умею. Да и неинтересно. Это только в идейных романах учат и лечат мужиков, а как я, ни с того ни с сего, возьму вдруг и пойду их лечить или учить?

Соня. А вот я так не понимаю, как это не идти и не учить. Погоди, и ты привыкнешь. (*Обнимает ее.*) Не скучай, родная.

⁴⁹ Ты скучаешь, не находишь себе места, а скука и праздность заразительны. Смотри: дядя Ваня ничего не делает и только ходит за тобою, как тень, я оставила свои дела и прибежала к тебе, чтобы поговорить. Обленилась, не могу!

⁵⁰ Оба – он и вы – заразили всех нас вашею праздностью. Я увлекся, целый месяц ничего не делал, а в это время люди болели, в лесах моих, лесных порослях, мужики пасли свой скот... Итак, куда бы ни ступили вы и ваш муж, всюду вы вносите разрушение...

⁵¹ Героям пьес удивительно не везет – и в большом, и в малом. Их вера рушится, желания не сбываются, начинания не удаются. Достигнутое их не удовлетворяет; ни любовь, ни труд не несут избавления.

⁵² Chekhov to A.S. Suvorin, 18 October 1892 (Chekhov 1994).

⁵³ Вероятно, Иван Петрович, оттого мы с вами такие друзья, что оба мы нудные, скучные люди! Нудные!

⁵⁴ ...никто не заставлял Гедду выходить замуж за Йоргена Тесмана. Она даже не прошла тот путь от «казалось» к «оказалось», как это пережила Маша в «Трех сестрах». Гедда с самого начала знала, что он за человек и какая жизнь ждет ее вместе с ним.

⁵⁵ ...никто никого не понимает, мир распался, связи бессодержательны, человек заключен в стеклянную скорлупу одиночества. Чеховский диалог обычно превращается в перемежающиеся монологи, в набор безадресных реплик.

⁵⁶ Андрей. Милый дед, как странно меняется, как обманывает жизнь!

(...)

Ферапонт: Не могу знать... Слышу-то плохо...

Андрей. Если бы ты слышал как следует, то я, быть может, и не говорил бы с тобой. Мне нужно говорить с кем-нибудь, а жена меня не понимает, сестер я боюсь почему-то, боюсь, что они засмеют меня, застыдят...

⁵⁷ Главными героями новой драмы становятся одинокие люди... Это именно духовное, а не физическое одиночество: человек живет в общественно населенном мире, принимает участие в его делах, но духовно ни к чему не прикреплен.

⁵⁸ А здесь ты всех знаешь и тебя все знают, но чужой, чужой... Чужой и одинокий.

⁵⁹ ...я бы вышла без любви. Кто бы ни посватал, все равно бы пошла, лишь бы порядочный человек. Даже за старика бы пошла...

⁶⁰ Я бы любила мужа.

⁶¹ Я не любила ни разу в жизни. О, я так мечтала о любви, мечтаю уже давно, дни и ночи, но душа моя, как дорогой рояль, который заперт и ключ потерял.

⁶² Я все ждала, переселимся в Москву, там мне встретится мой настоящий, я мечтала о нем, любила... Но оказалось, все вздор, все вздор...

⁶³ Жениться не нужно. Не нужно, потому что скучно.

⁶⁴ Так-то оно так, да одиночество. Как там ни философствуй, а одиночество страшная штука, голубчик мой...

⁶⁵ Если не хочешь быть одиноким, не женись.

⁶⁶ Хотя в сущности... конечно, решительно все равно!

⁶⁷ Вот вам моя жизнь и моя любовь: куда мне их девать, что мне с ними делать? Чувство мое гибнет даром, как луч солнца, попавший в яму, и сам я гибну.

⁶⁸ ...чувства как-то притупились. Ничего я не хочу, ничего мне не нужно, никого я не люблю...

⁶⁹ Я для себя уже ничего не жду, не люблю людей... Давно уже никого не люблю.

⁷⁰ Я никого не люблю и... уже не полюблю. Что меня еще захватывает, так это красота. Неравнодушен я к ней. Мне кажется, что если бы вот Елена Андреевна захотела, то могла бы

вскружить мне голову в один день... Но ведь это не любовь, не привязанность... *(Закрывает рукой глаза и вздрагивает.)*

⁷¹ Я понимаю эту бедную девочку. Среди отчаянной скуки, когда вместо людей кругом бродят какие-то серые пятна, слышатся одни пошлости, когда только и знают, что едят, пьют, спят, иногда приезжает он, не похожий на других, красивый, интересный, увлекательный, точно среди потемок восходит месяц ясный... Поддаться обаянию такого человека, забыться... Кажется, я сама увлеклась немножко. Да, мне без него скучно, я вот улыбаюсь, когда думаю о нем...

⁷² Оставайтесь, прошу вас. Сознайтесь, делать вам на этом свете нечего, цели жизни у вас никакой, занять вам своего внимания нечем, и, рано или поздно, все равно поддадитесь чувству, - это неизбежно. Так уж лучше это не в Харькове и не где-нибудь в Курске, а здесь, на лоне природы... Поэтично по крайней мере, даже осень красива...

⁷³ Этот дядя Ваня говорит, будто в моих жилах течет русалочья кровь. "Дайте себе волю хоть раз в жизни"... Что ж? Может быть, так и нужно... Улететь бы вольною птицей от всех вас, от ваших сонных физиономий, от разговоров, забыть, что все вы существуете на свете... Но я труслива, застенчива... Меня замучит совесть...

⁷⁴ Сегодня тепло, можно окна держать настежь, а березы еще не распускались. Отец получил бригаду и выехал с нами из Москвы одиннадцать лет назад, и, я отлично помню, в начале мая, вот в эту пору в Москве уже все в цвету, тепло, все залито солнцем. Одиннадцать лет прошло, а я помню там все, как будто выехали вчера.

⁷⁵ В прежнее время, когда был жив отец, к нам на именины приходило всякий раз по тридцать – сорок офицеров, было шумно, а сегодня только полтора человека и тихо, как в пустыне... Я уйду... Сегодня я в мерлехлюндии, невесело мне, и ты не слушай меня.

⁷⁶ О, где оно, куда ушло мое прошлое, когда я был молод, весел, умен, когда я мечтал и мыслил изящно, когда настоящее и будущее мое озарялись надеждой? Отчего мы, едва начавши жить, становимся скучны, серы, неинтересны, ленивы, равнодушны, бесполезны, несчастны...

⁷⁷ ...если через тысячу лет человек будет счастлив, то в этом немножко буду виноват и я.

⁷⁸ Через двести, триста лет жизнь на земле будет невообразимо прекрасной, изумительной. Человеку нужна такая жизнь, и если нет пока, то он должен предчувствовать ее, ждать, мечтать, готовиться к ней.

⁷⁹ ...вы не будете замечать Москвы, когда будете жить в ней. Счастья у нас нет и не бывает, мы только желаем его.

⁸⁰ Мне уже двадцать четвертый год, работаю уже давно, и мозг высох, похудела, подурнела, постарела, и ничего, ничего, никакого удовлетворения, а время идет, и все кажется, что уходишь от настоящей прекрасной жизни, уходишь все дальше и дальше, в какую-то пропасть. Я в отчаянии, я в отчаянии!

⁸¹ А теперь, если бы вы знали! Я ночи не сплю с досады, от злости, что так глупо проворонил время, когда мог бы иметь все, в чем отказывает мне теперь моя старость!

⁸² Дядя Ваня, скучно!

⁸³ Сейчас пройдет дождь, и все в природе освежится и легко вздохнет. Одного только меня не освежит гроза. Днем и ночью, точно домовой, душит меня мысль, что жизнь моя потеряна

безвозвратно. Прошлое нет, оно глупо израсходовано на пустяки, а настоящее ужасно по своей нелепости. Вот вам моя жизнь и моя любовь: куда мне их девать, что мне с ними делать?

⁸⁴ Жизнь промелькнула как молния.

⁸⁵ Чехов пишет... о быстротечности времени, перед которым беззащитен человек, не знающий смысла своего существования.

⁸⁶ Придет время, все узнают, зачем все это, для чего эти страдания, никаких не будет тайн, а пока надо жить... надо работать, только работать!

⁸⁷ ...страдания наши перейдут в радость для тех, кто будет жить после нас, счастье и мир настанут на земле...

⁸⁸ Настоящее противно, но зато когда я думаю о будущем, то как хорошо! Становится так легко, так просторно; и вдали забрезжит свет...

⁸⁹ Трагедия чеховских людей – от неукорененности в настоящем, которое они ненавидят и которого боятся. Подлинная, реально текущая мимо них жизнь кажется им чужой, извращенной, неправильной. Зато жизнь, долженствующая быть – источник, из которого они черпают силы для преодоления убийственной тоски повседневности.

⁹⁰ Будущее у Чехова не продолжение настоящего, и вообще не процесс, а точка, не эволюционное развитие, а революционное, предполагающее дискретность времени.

⁹¹ О, милые сестры, жизнь наша еще не кончена. Будем жить!

⁹² Только едят, пьют, спят, потом умирают... родятся другие, и тоже едят, пьют, спят и, чтобы не отупеть от скуки, разнообразят жизнь свою гадкой сплетней, водкой, картами, сутяжничеством, и жены обманывают мужей, а мужья лгут, делают вид, что ничего не видят, ничего не слышат, и неотразимо пошлое влияние гнетет детей, и искра божия гаснет в них, и они становятся такими же жалкими, похожими друг на друга мертвецами, как их отцы и матери...

⁹³ Дай мне чего-нибудь. О боже мой... Мне сорок семь лет; если, положим, я проживу до шестидесяти, то мне остается еще тринадцать. Долго! Как я проживу эти тринадцать лет? Что буду делать, чем наполню их?

⁹⁴ Понимаешь, если бы можно было прожить остаток жизни как-нибудь по-новому. Проснуться бы в ясное, тихое утро и почувствовать, что жить ты начал снова, что все прошлое забыто, рассеялось, как дым. (*Плачет.*) Начать новую жизнь... Подскажи мне, как начать... с чего начать...

⁹⁵ Когда нет настоящей жизни, то живут миражами.

⁹⁶ Улететь бы вольною птицей от всех вас, от ваших сонных физиономий, от разговоров, забыть, что все вы существуете на свете...

⁹⁷ Я так и решила: если мне не суждено быть в Москве, то так тому и быть. Значит, судьба. Ничего не поделаешь... Всё в божьей воле, это правда

⁹⁸ Однако простое перемещение чеховским героям не помогает. В сущности, им все равно, где жить: в деревне или в городе, в России или за границей – плохо всюду.

⁹⁹ Что же делать, надо жить! (*Пауза.*) Мы, дядя Ваня, будем жить. Проживем длинный, длинный ряд дней, долгих вечеров; будем терпеливо сносить испытания, какие пошлет нам судьба; будем трудиться для других и теперь, и в старости, не зная покоя, а когда наступит наш час, мы покорно умрем.

¹⁰⁰ Елена Андреевна. А хорошая сегодня погода... Не жарко...

(Пауза.)

Войницкий. В такую погоду хорошо повеситься...

¹⁰¹ Ты взял у меня из дорожной аптеки баночку с морфием. (Пауза.) Послушай, если тебе во что бы то ни стало хочется покончить с собою, то ступай в лес и застрелись там. Морфий же отдай, а то пойдут разговоры, догадки, подумают, что это я тебе дал... С меня же довольно и того, что мне придется вскрывать тебя... Ты думаешь, это интересно?

¹⁰² Да и некогда мне. Мне пора ехать.

¹⁰³ Отдай. Зачем ты нас пугаешь? (Нежно.) Отдай, дядя Ваня! Я, быть может, несчастна не меньше твоего, однако же не прихожу в отчаяние. Я терплю и буду терпеть, пока жизнь моя не окончится сама собою... Терпи и ты.

¹⁰⁴ Но надо скорее работать, скорее делать что-нибудь, а то не могу... не могу...

¹⁰⁵ Если бы вы могли видеть свое лицо, свои движения... Какая вам лень жить! Ах, какая лень!

¹⁰⁶ Ах, и лень, и скучно!

¹⁰⁷ И как я жива, как не убила себя до сих пор, не понимаю...

¹⁰⁸ ...мы останемся одни, чтобы начать нашу жизнь снова. Надо жить... Надо жить...

¹⁰⁹ Придет время, все узнают, зачем все это, для чего эти страдания, никаких не будет тайн, а пока надо жить... надо работать, только работать! Завтра я поеду одна, буду учить в школе и всю свою жизнь отдам тем, кому она, быть может, нужна.

¹¹⁰ ...вдали забрезжит свет, я вижу свободу, я вижу, как я и дети мои становимся свободны от праздности, от квасу, от гуся с капустой, от сна после обеда, от подлого тунеядства...

¹¹¹ Letter to Aleksandr Semenovich Lazarev, 1 November 1889

¹¹² ...в чеховских пьесах нет ни одной счастливой семьи, ни одной счастливой любви, ни один человек не находит в труде спасение – этот труд или тяжел и скучен, как у Сони, дяди Вани, Ольги, Ирины, или не находит признания, как у Астрова...

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